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Writing Melancholy:
The Death of the Intellectual in Modern Arabic Literature

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Writing Melancholy:
The Death of the Intellectual in Modern Arabic Literature

by

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Writing Melancholy:

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In this study on the depiction of the death of the Arab intellectual in elegiac writings since 1967, I examine the ways in which modern and contemporary Arab writers who identify with different literary and historical generations have mourned and commemorated the death of other Arab intellectuals. Drawing on theoretical contributions from psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and gender studies, particularly those investigating the articulations of masculinity and femininity in mourning practices, I argue that the psychological and political imprints of loss that emerge in the modern and contemporary elegies, eulogies, novels, and memoirs that I analyze, contribute to an elegiac discourse that is melancholic at its core. Both a somber outlook towards the world and a resistance to complete the work of mourning, melancholia, as I interpret it in my analysis of Arabic elegiac writings, is an emotion experienced collectively and subsequently channeled in the literary text. In their elegiac writings, the poets Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008), Samih al-Qasem (b. 1939), Mohammad al-Maghout (1934-2006), and

the novelist Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (1919-2004), have expressed a collective disillusionment with the modern role Arab intellectual and his embodiment of his generation's political and ethical sensibilities following the 1967 war. These writers, I argue, understand the death of their peers as a signifier of their generation's failure to lead their societies to the socialist and nationalist utopias that they have collectivity imagined. I demonstrate how in their elegiac writings, these poets and novelists in fact lament themselves and the collapse of their own modernist intellectual project in which they had attributed to the written word the power of collective salvation. As I investigate the commemoration of the intellectual in contemporary elegiac texts, I explore the works of young writers such as the Lebanese Rabih Jaber (b. 1974) and the Saudi Seba al-Herz (b. circa 1984). By gradually disengaging from the elegiac modes that their precursors had defined in the 1960s and 1970s, the two novelists have formulated counternarratives of mourning. The narrative that emanates from this literary subversion, I contend, presents a distinctive elegiac rhetoric, in which melancholia ceases to be a collective condition, but rather an individual and intimate state of mind of young protagonists marginalized by and critical of the dominant intellectual circles.

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Note on Translation and Transliteration

All translations from the original Arabic and French are my own except when I cite from Seba al-Herz's *The Others*, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's *In Search of Walid Masoud*, and Abdul Wahhab al-Bayati's "Lament to the June Sun." In these three instances, I use the English translations of the texts in Al-Bayati, Abdul Wahab. *Love, Death, and Exile: Poems Translated from Arabic*. Trans. Bassam Frangieh. Georgetown University Press, 1991; al-Herz, Seba. *The Others*. Seven Stories Press, 2009; Jabra, Jabra. *In Search of Walid Masoud*. Trans. Roger M. A. Allen, Adnan Haydar. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000.

I have based all transliterations from Modern Standard Arabic on the system provided by the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies [*IJMES*]. I have transliterated the glottal stop [ء] as ['] and the consonant [ع] as [ᶜ]. To enhance readability, I have used the most common English spelling for personal names and names of authors (e.g. *Ralph* instead of *Rālf; Elias Khoury* instead of *Ilyās Khūrī*).

CHAPTER 1

THE REPRESENTATION OF THE INTELLECTUAL IN ARAB ELEGIAC WRITINGS

O grave of the wise man
Who slept among the poor,
Silent, wearing the shroud of mourning
Silent, sparking a fire
Rise up and speak:
We are dead
We are the generation of meaningless death
We are the recipients of alms.

Abdul Wahhab al-Bayati,
"Lament for the June Sun"

A year following the June war of 1967, the Iraqi poet Abdul Wahhab al-Bayati (1926-1999) dedicated "Lament for the June Sun" (1968) to the memory of the Syrian intellectual Zaki al-Arsuzi (1899-1968). A prominent writer and political activist, al-Arsuzi conceptualized in his writings the tenets of what later became the nationalist and socialist Baath movement in Syria and Iraq.[1] Unlike his earlier poetry about regeneration, hope, and rebirth, al-Bayati's elegy to al-Arsuzi reveals a remarkably somber poetics of mourning. The mourned in al-Bayati's elegy is not only al-Arsuzi or the unifying nationalist project he had embodied in his lifetime. It

[1] Hanna Batatu analyzes al-Arsuzi's intellectual contributions in *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of Its Communists, Ba'thists and Free Officers*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989: 722-724. Print.

is also “a generation of meaningless death,” or al-Arsuzi’s entire generation of Arab intellectuals who witnessed with the 1967 June war the demise of idealism. As “recipient of alms,” the intellectuals with whom al-Bayati identifies became following this overwhelming defeat, redundant, overpowered, and pitiful subjects.

At the intersection of the lyrical and the political, the *marthiyya* [from *rithā,’* elegy] is a literary genre that has always blurred the distinction between private and public expressions of mourning. Regardless of the literary form it takes, the modern Arabic elegy in both poetry and prose provides a stage for a narrative voice that mourns, paradoxically, both the deceased dedicatee and the living collectivity signified by the first person plural “we.” As such, al-Bayati’s bleak depiction of the dead Arab intellectual encapsulates the impact of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war on modern Arab thought and literature. At this historical juncture, Arab intellectuals perceived the military loss and land annexation by Israel as symptomatic of the defeat of their modernization project that had begun with the *nahḍa* or the 19th century Arab Enlightenment. Arab writers expressed the collective anxiety produced by this historical in poetic elegies, eulogies, memoirs, and novels. Despite the proliferation of elegiac writings dedicated to Arab intellectuals and the growing interest in examining the articulation of loss within Arab intellectual history and literary criticism following 1967, little has been written on the elegy of the intellectual in modern and contemporary Arabic literature.

In this study on the depiction of the death of the Arab intellectual in elegiac

writings since 1967, I address this critical dearth and examine the ways in which modern and contemporary Arab writers who identify with different literary and historical generations have mourned and commemorated the death of other Arab intellectuals. Drawing on theoretical contributions from psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and gender studies, particularly those investigating the articulations of masculinity and femininity in mourning practices, I argue that the psychological and political imprints of loss that emerge in the modern and contemporary elegies, eulogies, novels, and memoirs that I analyze, contribute to an elegiac discourse that is melancholic at its core. Both a somber outlook towards the world and a resistance to complete the work of mourning, melancholia, as I interpret it in my analysis of Arabic elegiac writings, is an emotion experienced collectively and subsequently channeled in the literary text.

In their elegiac writings, the poets Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008), Samih al-Qasem (b. 1939), Mohammad al-Maghout (1934-2006), and the novelist Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (1919-2004), have expressed a collective disillusionment with the modern Arab intellectual and his embodiment of his generation's political and ethical sensibilities following the 1967 war. These writers, I argue, understand the death of their peers as a signifier of their generation's failure to lead their societies to the socialist and nationalist utopias that they have collectivity imagined. I demonstrate how in their elegiac writings, these poets and novelists in fact lament themselves and the collapse of their own modernist intellectual project in which

they had attributed to the written word the power of collective salvation. By mourning their peers, these writers thus construct a melancholic poetics that depicts the modern Arab intellectual as both the mourner and the object of mourning.

As I investigate the commemoration of the intellectual in contemporary elegiac texts, I explore the works of young writers such as the Lebanese Rabih Jaber (b. 1974) and the Saudi Seba al-Herz (b. circa 1984). By gradually disengaging from the elegiac modes that their precursors had defined in the 1960s and 1970s, the two novelists have formulated counternarratives of mourning. The narrative that emanates from this literary subversion, I contend, presents a distinctive elegiac rhetoric, in which melancholia ceases to be a collective condition, but rather an individual and intimate state of mind of young protagonists marginalized by and critical of the dominant intellectual circles. Disavowing their roles as the guardians of their generation's political and nationalist identities, young writers portray the contemporary intellectual as a lone melancholic character suffering from a sense of loss caused by anxieties experienced and narrated at an intimate level. Not only is this young generation of writers redefining he role of the politically engaged intellectual, but it also resignifying the concept of 'generation' either by dehistoricizing it, as Rabih Jaber does in *Ralph Rizkallah through the Looking Glass*, or by embedding it in a transhistorical and transgenerational sectarian identity, as Seba al-Herz does in *The Others*.

Modern Articulations of Loss

Composed and recited following the loss of family members, patrons, or even cities and social values, the Arabic elegy in its classical, neoclassical, and modern forms, has become "an indispensable part of the impersonal social ceremonial of mourning" (DeYoung 63). The origins of the *marthiyya* may be traced as far as the pre-Islamic era when female relatives of the deceased performed rhymed and rhythmic laments at funeral corteges of their male relatives. Although male poets like Mutammim ibn Nuwayra (d. 667) did compose elegies, early classical elegies are best represented by the renowned women poets Layla al-Akhyaliyya (d. circa 704) and al-Khansa (575-645) who recited elegies that simultaneously expressed a personal, spiritual, and collective loss. In their laments, women poets portrayed the death of their husbands, brothers, sons, and fathers, as a collective affliction that unites the entire clan or tribe. In the Umayyad age, elegies to the assassinated caliph, Ali bin abi Talib (599-661), and to his son and the Prophet's grandson, Husayn (626 – 680), became defining elements of Shiʿi religious identity and aesthetic sensitivity. The Abbasid era was marked by the poetry of al-Mutanabbi (915-965), who drew in his elegies of patrons and relatives on the structure and aesthetics of the classical panegyric [*madīḥ*] and thus further blurred the boundaries between personal and political expressions of mourning.[2]

[2] Al-Mutnabbi in general and his elegies in particular have been the subject of numerous studies. See, for instance, Larkin, Margaret. *Al-Mutanabbi: Voice of the 'Abbasid Poetic Ideal.* London: Oneworld, 2008. Print. Stetkevych, Suzanne Pinckney. *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy: Myth, Gender, and Ceremony in the Classical Arabic Ode.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002. Print.

In the *nahḍa,* or the Arab Enlightenment era, Arab poets reverted to the structure and aesthetics of the classical Arabic ode, *qaṣīḍa*, in order to convey the complexities surrounding the emergence of literary, intellectual, and political modernization movements in the Arab world. As the most prominent poets of their time, Ahmad Shawqi (1869-1932) and Hafez Ibrahim (1872-1932) advanced in their neo-classical elegies republican, nationalist, and secular values (Noorani 1997). In their commemoration of the class of educated and bourgeois *efendiyya*, Shawqi and Ibrahim "poetically transform[ed] the rites of mourning into a process of national birth" (Ibid. 39). Thus, as they mourned national leaders and intellectuals, *nahḍa* poets announced the rise of both their nation and their modern collective identities.

Following the collapse of the French and British Empires during the Second World War, the newly independent Arab nation-states drew on the legacy of the 19th century Arab *nahḍa* in an attempt to incorporate the European Enlightenment values of secularism, social justice, and nationalism into their nascent national institutions.[3] The partition of Palestine in 1947 and the Arab military loss to Israel in 1948 both fostered an anti-colonial discourse paralleled by a utopian ideology of socialist nationalism. The 1967 defeat called for radical intellectual and political

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[3] For studies about the emergence of new literary genres and poetic themes during the *nahḍa* see Kadhim, Hussein N. *Poetics of Anti-Colonialism in the Arabic Qasidah*. Brill Academic Publishers, 2004. Print. and Noorani, Yaseen. "A Nation Born in Mourning: The Neoclassical Funeral Elegy in Egypt." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 28.1 (1997): 38-67.

revisions in a moment of suspicion and rejection of the modernist ideals heralded in the 19th century *nahḍa*.

The gravity of this historical juncture inflicted an injury on Arab subjectivity, or what the Syrian thinker George Tarabishi (b. 1936) describes as a "narcissistic wound" because of the collective fixation on loss that the "wound" of 1967 has elicited in contemporary Arab thought. In his analysis of the collective sense of defeat following the 1967 war, Tarabishi employs a psychoanalytic theoretical framework in order to study the relationship between Arab intellectuals and the Arab-Islamic cultural heritage [*turāth*] (1991). Tarabishi posits that the "modern Arab discourse," which materialized between 1939 and 1967, incorporated Enlightenment ideals about nationalism, education, and equality. Following the 1967 defeat by Israel, Arab intellectual circles began contributing to what Tarabishi identifies as the "contemporary Arab discourse" that the violent defeat subsequently transformed. The severity of the shock, according to Tarabishi, molded contemporary Arab subjectivity:

> Great shockwaves – such as those of 1967– that hit groups and collectivities engender a series of similar and unified reactions. The collectivity will seem to behave like the individual, and may therefore be considered a unit worthy of study. This is particularly true in psychoanalysis, which, despite its focus on the individual, can still develop models to understand the psychoanalytic makeup of the collectivity. (9)

The war of 1967, Tarabishi adds, was a trauma [*ridda*] that signaled the demise of Enlightenment ideals incorporated in modern Arabic intellectual discourse. Indeed, for Tarabishi the reverberations of the political and intellectual shocks ushered Arab

intellectuals into a contemporary state of collective neurosis [*ʿuṣāb*] that has led them to psychological regression [*nukūṣ*], the echoes of which continue to resonate in contemporary Arabic thought. This collective regression, he argues, manifests itself in Arab intellectuals' projection of their contemporary anxieties onto the Arab cultural heritage [*turāth*]. The importance of Tarabishi's contribution lies in his identification of 1967 as a historical moment so critical as to forge a melancholic Arab subjectivity emerging from a collective anxiety.

The collective inward introspection [*al-naqd al-dhātī*] following 1967 has led Arab thinkers to search for the cause of the defeat within the nationalist and socialist paradigms to which they had contributed. Islamist, nationalist, and communist intellectuals, including those who identify with more than one of these ideological currents, have all commented profusely on the gravity of 1967 as a historical moment that has redefined modern intellectual debates (Boullata 1990). In recent years, contributions from the field of intellectual history have revisited the works of prominent thinkers whose critical writing is symptomatic of the collective anxiety that a generation of Arab intellectuals underwent following the 1967 war (Abu Rabih 2004; Kassab 2010).

The reverberations of the 1967 war have not only profoundly shaped and influenced contemporary Arabic thought, but also the themes and aesthetics of Arabic culture in all its literary, cinematographic, and theatrical expressions. On the literary front, the novels of Abdel Rahman Munif (1933-2004), Ghassan Kanafani

(1936-1972), Hoda Barakat (b. 1952) as well as the poetry of Fadwa Touqan (1917-2003), Adonis (b. 1930), and Saadi Youssef (b. 1933), all attest to the transformative effect of the political and military defeats that the Arab world witnessed over the last century.

Literary critics have also identified 1967 as a historical juncture that resulted in a paradigm shift in modern Arabic literature, which thereafter reflected an increased thematic and formal focus on defeat, and by extension, a melancholic representation of the intellectual. Elias Khoury (1974), Shukri Madi (1978), and Edwar al-Kharrat (1993) have all analyzed the implications of the political, military, and ideological defeats on the emergence of new literary sensibilities and narrative themes. Recent studies have explored this paradigm shift in the works of writers who adopted intertexuality, metafiction, and narrative fragmentation in order to covey the profound changes that their writers' world was in the process of experiencing. Critics like Angelika Neuwirth and Andreas Pflitsch in *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives* (2010), for instance, have examined these emerging trends from within postmodern theories investigating the rise of new literary genres and writing techniques mainly in the Palestinian and Lebanese literary contexts (Meyer 2001; Caiani 2007; Starkey et al. 2006).

In that context of loss and defeat, the modern elegy retained some of the themes that characterized the classical elegy. Although it no longer abided by the rhymed and rhythmic exigencies of the classical Arabic *qaṣīḍa*, the modern elegy

continued to collapse the distinction between the personal and the political, social, and ethical concerns of the modern Arab poet. Describing the role of the elegy as a conveyor of the anxieties of the modern poet, Muhsin al-Musawi notes that

> Elegies no longer work as expressions of lamentation and love for a single individual, despite the resilient presence of such shades, nor do they necessarily court the ancient combination of fertility rites or calls to revenge and blood as functionally intertwined in future reclamation and victory. [They are] chants of grim dismay at a grim past and present. (2006: 263-264)

Thus, in the modern elegy, poets merge their personal losses with their political and moral concerns. The Syrian poet Adonis (b. 1930), for instance, laments his disillusionment with his modernist poetic project in *The Elegy for the Time at Hand* (1958) whereas Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008) addresses his *Ode to Beirut* (1984) to the ravaged city following the Israeli invasion in 1982. Modern elegies were also dedicated to national leaders including Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-1970)[4] and Yasser Arafat (1929-2004), and prominent intellectuals like Mahmoud Darwish, Badr Shaker al-Sayab (1926–1964), and Edward Said (1935-2003), among others. In addition to poetry, elegies appeared in prose in the form of memoirs, newspaper eulogies, speeches in commemoration ceremonies, and even short stories and novels either dedicated to or based on the life of a deceased public figure.

Following the 1967 war, the Arab world witnessed other significant events like the 1970s Black September war in Jordan, the June war of 1973, the Lebanese

[4] See DeYoung's analysis of "The Man with the Green Shadow," Darwish's elegy of Nasser. In DeYoung, Terri. "Nasser and the Death of Elegy". Eds. Boullata, Issa and Khouri, Monah. *Tradition and Modernity in Arabic Literature*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997. 63-86. Print.

civil war that began in 1975, the Camp David Peace treaty in 1977, the Israeli invasion of Beirut in 1982, the first and second Gulf Wars and the two Intifadas. These successive losses built upon the initial loss engendered by 1967 and sustained a forty-year cycle of Arab melancholia. In their elegiac writing, Darwish, al-Qasem, al-Maghout, and Jabra, all considered the 1967 war a turning point in the representation of the Arab intellectual as both a melancholic subject and a melancholic object or "both the one lost and the one losing" (Cheng 17).

The (Self-)Representation of the Intellectual

The experience of exile and dislocation, which many Arab intellectuals endured, has engendered a conceptualization of the role of the intellectual as a distant critic. Edward Said, who wrote extensively on exile, identifies the intellectual not as a political agent, but as an observant critic who derives his legitimacy from severing his parochial and communal ties and embracing his isolation (2000). Thus, the exilic intellectual is a permanent inhabitant of the border, a liminal space between political and intellectual identifications. This state of non-belonging caused by literal and metaphoric homelessness, Said argues, creates a force of critical and creative power, or what he calls *secular criticism*. As secular critics, exilic intellectuals embrace a paradigm that is "life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination and abuse; its social goals are non-coercive knowledge produced in the interest of human freedom" (2000: 242). Said notes that as a distant critic, the intellectual is "an individual endowed with a faculty for

representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public" (1993: 13). According to Said, the role of the intellectual is not to rally people around a cause, but to expose consensus and destabilize mainstream beliefs. Since this representation of intellectual commitment favors a word-centered discourse, it has been subject to strong criticism by the following generation of politically committed intellectuals who emerged after the 1967 war.

In the different elegies, novels, or memoirs that I analyze, writers link their understanding of the intellectual to the concept of political commitment [*iltizām*] and depict the Arab novelist, poet, or critic as a public intellectual organically tied to the needs of his community. Writers conceptualize their role as intellectuals [*muthaqqafūn*] who represent and speak in the name of their peoples' social and political causes. Positioned at the intersection of political action and creativity, the intellectual identifies himself as well as his peer as "the cultural intellectual who is also a political militant, the intellectual who produces both poetry and praxis" (Jameson 1986: 75). Despite being essential features in modern elegies, the concept of political commitment and the figure of the intellectual have been appropriated and interrogated within different historical and national contexts, and hence, across the texts that I explore in my study.

The conceptualization of the intellectual as both a cultural and a political agent emerged in Arab intellectual circles in the early 1950s with the embrace of

Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism, which Sartre delineates in his argument about literature in "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" (1945). In this hugely influential essay, Sartre examines the relationship between the writer and his society and argues, in the words of Yoav Di-Capua, that "since writing is a consequential form of acting/being, intellectuals should assume political responsibility for their work and the circumstances that condition it" (11). Many Arab intellectuals interpreted the practical implications of the connection between writing and human freedom as a call to direct political action (Idem.) The embrace of political commitment soon translated into the publication of works by a new generation of politically committed novelists and poets in literary journals and publishing houses. A significant contributor and promoter of literature of commitment, Suhayl Idriss (1927-2008), founded the influential literary journal *Al-Adab* in Beirut in 1953. *Al-Adab* and its publishing house *Dar al-Adab* became an important platform for young critics, poets, and novelists who embraced socialism, the Palestinian national struggle, and the Free-Verse Movement in their works.[5]

With the rise of independence movements in North Africa and resistance movements in Palestine, political commitment in Arabic literature continued in the 1960s under the form of 'resistance literature.' Originally coined by the Palestinian writer and critic Ghassan Kanafani in his study entitled *Literature of Resistance in*

[5] The genesis of political commitment—particularly as it was articulated in *Al-Adab*—was discussed in Di-Capua (2011:13-20) and Klemm, Verena. "Different Notions of Commitment (Iltizam) and Committed Literature (al-adab Al-multazim) in the Literary Circles of the Mashriq." *Arabic & Middle Eastern Literature* 3.1 (2000): 51–62. Print.

Occupied Palestine (1968), 'resistance literature' referred to a "category of literature that emerged significantly as part of the organized liberation struggles and resistance movements in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East" (Harlow 1987: xvii).[6] According to Barbara Harlow, writers who subscribe to this variant of the literature of commitment understand their literary contributions as both an outcome and a critique of the historical and material conditions that have defined their works (111). Resistance literature, in that context, provides a platform for the expression of counter-narratives to past injustices, a corrective intervention that Harlow identifies as "righting political wrongs" (1992: 244, 256). In the aftermath of a collective sense of humiliation, emasculation, and loss, the critical intellectuals' lack of engagement was held responsible for the defeat and was subsequently invalidated. As such, a search for new literary modes of resistance began.

A seminal figure in resistance literature, the character of the *fidā'ī* [7] or the Palestinian male freedom fighter appeared in a political setting beset by numerous political and military defeats. Portrayed as a counter-intellectual, the *fidā'ī* has been represented in the works of Arab writers across different literary generations as a messianic figure that salvages his nation from the collapse of the theoretical and word-centered discourse of intellectuals. An illustration of this anti-intellectual,

[6] For commemorative essays about Ghassan Kanafani in which the tenets of resistance literature are illustrated further, see Elias Khoury, Ihsan Abbas, and Fadl al Naqeeb. *Ghassān Kanafānī: Insānan Wa-Adīban Wa-Munāḍilan*. Beirut: al-Ittiḥād al-ʿĀmm lil-Kuttāb wa-al-ṣuḥufīyīn al-Filasṭīnīyīn, 1974. Print. And Siddiq, Muhammad. *Man Is a Cause: Political Consciousness and the Fiction of Ghassān Kanafānī*. Distributed by University of Washington Press, 1984. Print.

[7] Fidā'ī is from the Arabic *fadā* [f-d-y] or " to sacrifice."

militant position appears clearly in Mahmoud Darwish' *A Praise of the High Shadow* (1984), which is both an elegy and a panegyric to the Palestinian *fidā'ī* who, despite his besiegement and disillusionment by Arab politicians and intellectuals, flourishes and annihilates his enemies. I make this point in my analysis of Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's *In Search of Walid Masoud* by demonstrating how the character of the *fidā'ī* emerges following the defeat that undermined the theoretical and politically removed discourse of the exilic Palestinian intellectual living in Baghdad in the 1950s and 1960s.

The literature of commitment and its variant, resistance literature, were interpreted differently in other national contexts in which intellectuals were not protesting political and military occupation, but, rather, the systematic erasure of collective memory. In the Lebanese context, political commitment emerged in the post-civil war in the writings of the Lebanese novelist Elias Khoury.[8] In his novels, interviews, and critical essays, Khoury has identified the literary text and the novel, especially, as a critical tool that resists the obfuscation and silencing of collective memories. In the postwar era, the Lebanese state launched several reconstruction projects that the majority of Lebanese intellectuals interpreted as a systematic process of erasing the memory of the war and silencing counter-narratives about war events. For Elias Khoury and other intellectuals writing in Beirut in the 1990s, the role of the politically committed intellectual was to safeguard his community's

[8] Ken Seigneurie analyzes the role of Elias Khoury in the postwar Lebanese memory debates in *Crisis and Memory*. Reichert, 2004. Print.

collective memory by depicting marginal characters, endangered traditional neighborhoods, and silenced historical narratives.[9] As a guardian of collective memory, the politically committed intellectual himself is codified within a structure of symbols that render him a valuable member of his community due to his ability to protect and salvage its lost memory.

On par with political commitment as a defining feature of the Arab intellectual's self-identification, the concept of "generation" is ubiquitous in Arab political thought and literary criticism. Indeed, literary critics and historians across the Arab world— including the Egyptian Salah ʿAbd al-Sabur, the Saudi Mai Yamani, and the Lebanese Nasim Daher, to name a few—have deployed the Arabic term, *jīl*, to signify an age group whose coming of age either coincided with or was driven by historical events and literary movements that instigated deep political and cultural transformations. I trace this widespread understanding of 'generation' to Karl Mannheim's early identification of the concept. For the social historian writing in the late 1950s, "The social phenomenon of generations represents nothing more than a particular kind of identity location, embracing related 'age-groups' embedded in a historical-social process" (367). Expanding on Mannheim's concept of generation that links collective age-group identification to historical events, José Ortega y Gasset and his disciple Julián Marías argued that major historical crises,

[9] See Elias Khoury's interview with Sonia Mejcher "Interview with Elias Khoury: The necessity to forget and to remember," in *Banipal* 12 (2001), pp. 8-14. and his collection of essays particularly about collective memory in Khūrī, Ilyās. *Al-Dhākirah Al-mafqūdah: Dirāsāt Naqdīyah. Bayrūt Lubnān: Mu'assasat al-Abḥāth al-ʿArabīyah*, 1982. Print.

such as World Wars or revolutions, radically alter a generation's beliefs and orientation. In the wake of such profound historical transformations, a "decisive generation" emerges. Marías maintains that a "decisive generation" is one that "for the first time thinks the new thoughts with full clarity and with complete possession of their meaning, a generation that is neither still a precursor nor any longer bound by the past" (1970: 100). The intellectual break with the past as well as the vague nature of the future creates a liminal state of possibility and risk where change occurs on both social and individual levels. This conceptualization of 'generation,' that al-Bayati evokes in "Elegy for the June Sun," as the intersection of historical circumstances and collective memory, is a recurrent referent in the elegiac writings of Mahmoud Darwish, Samih al-Qasem, Mohammad al-Maghout, and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra.

The writers whose works I engage in this study positioned themselves and each other as members of historical and literary generations defined and shaped by shared historical events, ideological frameworks, and literary trends. Thus, these modern writers transformed their elegies to their peers into laments for the entire generation of Arab intellectuals with whom they have identified. The "nakba generation," "the 1967 generation," the Lebanese "generation of ruins," and the Iraqi "generation of dreamers," among others, are all recurrent descriptions in the texts that I analyze. It is also worth noting that in addition to his signification as member of a generation or a historical juncture experienced collectively, the Arab intellectual

in these texts is a masculine construct. The "wise man," to which al-Bayati's refers in his elegy, is a male intellectual whose lament evokes a gendered mourning discourse. In my analysis of the representation of Arab intellectuals, I show how this exclusive group of male intellectuals employs a gendered and particularly masculine rhetoric. The elegiac texts that I explore reveal a construction of both the mourner and the mourned as male intellectuals who are politically committed yet complicit in reproducing patriarchal structures that silence and sideline alternative discourses on loss by and about women or other underrepresented subjects. This "paradoxically progressive and retrograde brand of masculinity" (Aghacy 55) is at the core of the modernist critical discourse that Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and Mahmoud Darwish, and other modern intellectuals have espoused in their writings.[10]

Melancholic Intellectuals

The complex trajectory of melancholia from Greek philosophical and scientific traditions to the works of the medieval Arab philosopher and physician Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and back to medieval and modern Europe displaces melancholia as a product of western episteme (Al-Ghadeer 2007: 288-289). Despite the richness of this traveling tradition, it is Freud's definition of melancholia at the beginning of the 20th century that radically transformed the ways in which we have come to understand the concept today.

[10] Samira Aghacy explores the representation of masculinity in Lebanese, Jordanian, Palestinian, Syrian, and Iraqi literatures in the context collective anxieties about gender roles and sexuality in Arab societies following the 1967 war. Aghacy, Samira. *Masculine Identity in the Fiction of the Arab East Since 1967*. Syracuse University Press, 2009. Print.

In “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), Freud identifies melancholia as a psychological disorder that he distinguished from mourning; a socially and clinically sanctioned practice of surviving the loss of loved ones. According to Freud, mourning is “the reaction to the loss of a loved person or the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one” (234). Mourning is thus a normative process of accepting the loss of a loved object and a feeling that usually fades with time. For Freud, mourning and melancholia share the same features of a pessimistic perception of the outside world and the subject’s inability to adopt a new love object. The distinguishing feature of melancholia, however, is that not only is the subject’s external world disturbed, but so is his/her internal psychic order. Indeed, following the tragedy of loss, the self-image of the melancholic subject undergoes profound and damaging transformations. Unwilling to release the lost object and accept its loss, the ego identifies with it, internalizes it, and subjects itself to the same critical process to which the love object is naturally subjected. The melancholic subject’s ego is thereby debased and destroyed. For Freud, the mourner’s loss is a conscious one, as the mourner is aware of the loss, knows its implications, and grieves it accordingly. The melancholic subject experiences loss differently. Although the melancholic may be well aware of the lost object, he or she is not conscious of what ideal is also lost in this object. Freud argues, in fact, “the subject knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him” (245). This inability to identify the nature of the loss or the ideal inherent in the lost object

becomes a defining element of the melancholic's unconscious that transforms his ego and haunts his external world. In later essays, Freud revised his earlier distinctions between normative mourning and pathological melancholia. Renouncing his earlier claims about the necessity to sever ties with lost object, Freud argues in the "The Ego and the Id" (1926) that melancholia is an unavoidable part of the formation of the ego. Preserving the relationship with lost loved ones by incorporating them into the ego constitutes for Freud an essential element of psychological development.

Disciplines such as anthropology, history, and literary criticism have subsequently appropriated Freud's conceptualization of melancholia as a constitutive element of contemporary subjectivities. Scholars from within feminist (Butler 2006; Kristeva 1992), postcolonial (Gilroy 2005), and critical race theories (Eng 2003; Cheng 2001) have built on Freud's revised understanding of melancholia and conceived of it as a socially and politically constructed condition that defines modern subjects in a century marked by the loss of identities, homelands, and ideals. In the field of Arabic literary criticism, two recent studies have offered valuable insights about the articulation of melancholia in Arabic elegiac literature. In *Signifying Loss* (2011) Nouri Gana provides a comparative analysis of the depiction of collective experiences of loss in postcolonial novels by Tahar Ben Jelloun, Jamaica Kincaid, and Elias Khoury. As he examines the ways in which these authors have codified mourning and trauma in their writing, Gana traces the political and ethical

imprints of that representation. Gana's comparative approach to mourning across various postcolonial narrative traditions provides an important framework for analyzing the depiction of loss in the context of war and repressed memories of violence, which is the subject of my analysis of Rabih Jaber's *Ralph Rizkallah through the Looking Glass*.

Similarly engaging the depiction of loss in Arabic literature from a theoretical perspective, Moneera al-Ghadeer's *Desert Voices* (2009) sheds light on hitherto silenced poetry of Arabian women by examining structures of desire, love, and loss in a theoretical framework that draws on gender, postcolonial, and psychoanalytic theories. Al-Ghadeer argues that in the context of tribal boundaries and restrictions, women poets express their desire in a melancholic register that negotiates their position within the social and political order one the one hand, and articulates a gendered representation of loss on the other. In dialogue with Judith Butler's theoretical contributions, al-Ghadeer's conceptualization of melancholia transcends the Freudian representation of melancholia as pathology. As a cultural construct determined and shaped by social restrictions, melancholia for al-Ghadeer is not a mental condition but "the phantasm of being loyal to the lost object and establishing unending love, with all it entails, from a state of waiting, agony and pleasure" (47). Al-Ghadeer's theoretical engagement of Bedouin women poetry paves the way for my understanding of melancholia not as pathology, but as a collective reaction to and articulation of a shared sense of loss.

The concept of 'collective memory' as it was developed by Maurice Halbwachs and Paul Connerton provides valuable insights into the ways in which national, racial, or gendered communities—and in our case, intellectual communities—fathom common historical experiences and reconstruct them in a melancholic literary discourse. Halbwachs emphasized the strong influence of social processes not only on peoples' personal memories, but also on their community's common memories of the past. The construction of collective memory is the cornerstone of groups united by familial, class, or religious identifications (1992: 104-107). In his study about the relationship between ritual performance and collective memory, Paul Connerton argues that it is "through commemoration rituals that a community is reminded of its identity and represented by and told in a masternarrative" (1989: 70–71). Commemorative texts therefore appear in moments of collective crisis in identifications induced by the destabilization of ideological paradigms that had supported a community's sense of self. In that context, "memory is valorized where identity is problematized" (Kansteiner 184). My understanding of melancholia as a collective condition induced by a troubled recollection of the past resonates with Orhan Pamuk's concept of *hüzün* and Julia Kristeva's conceptualization of French 'national depression'.

The collective sense of melancholy that marks and unites the inhabitants of Istanbul is what Orhan Pamuk identifies as *hüzün* in his childhood memoirs about the city (2005). *Hüzün* is the collective feeling of loss that unites the inhabitants of

Istanbul as they reminisce about the glory of the Ottoman capital while they witness its slow decay:

> No matter how ill-kept, no matter how neglected or hemmed in they are by concrete monstrosities, the great mosques and other monuments of the city, as well as the lesser detritus of empire in every side street and corner—the little arches, fountains, and neighborhood mosques—inflict heartaches on all who live among them. (101)

Istanbul, Pamuk notes, does not experience *hüzün* as an illness or an unavoidable pain but instead, as a choice or a collective perspective on life that draws on a romantic recollection of the past (103).

A similar romantic representation of the past held in contrast to a deteriorating present causes what Kristeva calls 'national depression' in the French political and cultural context. In *Revolt, She Said* (1998), Kristeva comments on the collective malaise that has marked contemporary French culture. She argues that France suffers from a 'national depression,' a collective ailment comparable in its symptoms to individual depression from which patients suffer. Kristeva notes that as a collectivity, France has not recovered from the blow to its self-esteem after the Second World War and that, as a collective construct, France has become isolated and withdrawn. Kristeva states:

> We no longer have the image of the great power that de Gaulle restored to us; France's voice is less and less heard and has less weight in European negotiations, even less when in competition with America. Migrant influxes have created familiar difficulties and more or less justifiable sense of insecurity, even of persecution. Ideals or clear and simple perspectives like the ones demagogic ideologies used to offer—and they are no less tempting—are out of place. In this setting, the country is reacting no differently than a depressed patient. The first reaction is to withdraw: you

> shut yourself away at home, don't get out of bed, don't talk, you complain. (55)

The destabilization of the constructs that had defined French national identity, including the nation's leading role in European and world politics, the country's homogenous social fabric, as well as the demise of the French colonial empire, have all fostered a collective sense of loss of ideal constructs, power, and status. Due to this profound feeling of loss, the collectivity engages in an introspective and melancholic rapport with the outside world.[11] Both Pamuk and Kristeva conceptualize melancholia as a collective state of mind prompted by a romantic recollection of past glories. Whereas Pamuk upholds the spiritual character of *hüzün* as an affective and aesthetic lens through which the inhabitants of Istanbul perceive their world, Kristeva identifies 'national depression' as a collective condition that deserves critical attention, particularly form psychoanalysis. My understanding of melancholia in Arab elegiac writings is thus at the intersection of both Kristeva and Pamuk's approaches that define melancholia not as a pathology, but as a reaction to loss that is articulated and experienced collectively.

[11] Sam Haig discusses the details of the debate between the French intellectual Bernard Pivot and the former Dean of the Académie Française Maurice Druon on the 'contamination' of French language and its contributions to the 'malaise Français,' in Haigh, Sam. "Migration and Melancholia: From Kristeva's 'Dépression Nationale' to Pineau's 'Maladie De L'exil'." *French Studies: A Quarterly Review* 60.2 (2006): 232-250. Web. 23 June 2011.

Chapter Division

In my study on elegiac writings in modern and contemporary Arabic literature, I conduct close readings of elegiac texts that I deem characteristic of the theoretical and thematic frameworks in which writers mourned other Arab intellectuals. In my analysis, I probe multiple literary genres such as modern elegies, memoirs, commemorative essays, editorials, and interviews, in order to historically and discursively situate the texts that I explore. The different texts on which I base my arguments, although limited in number, are representative of modern and contemporary elegiac trends. The poets, critics, and novelists that I explore in my research have been consecrated within the modern Arabic literary tradition and their works have been the subject of countless studies that I address in my detailed analysis.

In chapter 2, I analyze *In Search of Walid Masoud* by the prominent Palestinian novelist and critic Jabra Ibrahim Jabra. I particularly examine the ways in which the generation of Arab writers to which Jabra belonged was imagined, celebrated, and subsequently mourned. Jabra's novel, as I demonstrate, depicts the implications of the 1967 defeat on the modernist discourse of Jabra's generation of intellectuals and paves the way for an alternative literary portrayal of the exilic Palestinian by moving away from the character of the intellectual to that of the *fidā'ī*. The literary metamorphosis of the Palestinian exilic intellectual into a *fidā'ī* in

Jabra's *Walid Masoud* announces the demise of a generation of Arab intellectuals who witnessed the collapse of their modernist projects.

In Chapter 3, I examine the elegies that Mahmoud Darwish, Samih al-Qasem, and Muhammad al-Maghout dedicated to other Arab poets. By investigating the ways in which the three poets embrace mourning not only as a performative act, but also as a gesture of fidelity to the mourned, I argue that the three elegies blur the boundaries between mourning and melancholia. As the poets recall their shared memory of exile and political alienation, they construct a melancholic elegiac discourse in which they transcend the personal and the pathological and lament their friends and themselves as members of an entire generation of intellectuals embattled by defeat.

In the second half of this study, I examine the novels of two young Arab authors whose works have yet to receive the critical attention that they deserve. Despite the vastly different narrative styles and themes that distinguish these works from one another, both al-Herz and Jaber reconstruct in their novels the generational shift that has occurred in the portrayal of the mourned intellectual. By shedding light on national literary experiences (Lebanese and Saudi) and thematic genres (Lebanese postwar novel and Saudi women's literature), I show how the two authors have diverged from the dominant depiction of loss in the writings of their predecessors by engaging intertexuality, metafiction, and parody in their representation of the Arab intellectual.

In chapter 4, I explicate the ways in which Rabih Jaber in *Ralph Rizkallah through the Looking Glass* simultaneously engages and subverts the narrative framework of his precursors. In his novel, Jaber proposes an alternative representation of the suicide of the prominent Lebanese intellectual Ralph Rizkallah (1950-1995). Unlike Elias Khoury, who interpreted the suicide of Rizkallah as an act of protest of the Lebanese state's postwar reconstruction policies, Jaber constructs a narrative that situates the death of Rizkallah not in a pre-established masternarrative about suicide as an act of protest, but in the personal and psychological afflictions of the intellectual. The young novelist searches for answers about Ralph Rizkallah's suicide not in his community's anxieties but in his writings, which convey a melancholic intellectual suffering from a deep sense of personal loss and alienation.

In chapter 5, I analyze Seba al-Herz's *The Others* and demonstrate how, although critically dismissed, the novel stages a unique exploration of the psychological and physical traces of political violence within the Shiʿi community of Saudi Arabia. I particularly examine the ways in which the collective experiences of violence and loss resurface as an unconscious and destructive energy that haunts the narrator as she mourns her brother who was a prominent intellectual in his community. The legacy of communal oppression and personal grief that the narrator carries, I argue, mutates into transgenerational specters that possess her body and trigger her recurring mental collapse. Furthermore, in my reading of *The Others,* I

contend that al-Herz's depiction of political violence presents an alternative interpretation of political commitment in contemporary Arabic literature. I argue that al-Herz's portrayal of melancholia as physical illness allows her to distance herself from the representation of loss in modern Arabic literature and challenge its overarching ideological premises.

CHAPTER 2

JABRA IBRAHIM JABRA'S *IN SEARCH OF WALID MASOUD*, OR THE LAMENT OF A GENERATION

> He isn't finished. We're the ones who are finished, you and I and the others. We're beating our heads against cement walls and aren't prepared to admit these very same walls are the end.
>
> Jabra I. Jabra,
> In Search of Walid Masoud

In April 2010, a car explosion in Princesses Street near the Egyptian embassy in Baghdad killed seventeen people. It also destroyed a deserted two-story house and all that it contained. In the rubble, there were plays by Anton Chekhov (1860-1904), novels by Ghassan Kanafani (1936-1972), translations of Shakespeare and Faulkner, paintings by the Iraqi Shaker Hassan (1925-2004), sculptures by his compatriot Mohammad Ghani Hikmat (b. 1929), countless classical music records, and a cornerstone brought from the debris of a home in Bethlehem (Shadid 2010). These were the ruins of the home that the Palestinian writer Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (1920-1994) had built in his Iraqi exile.

The mass displacement of Palestinians to the Arab world following the *nakba* in 1948, particularly to Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan introduced exile literature [*adab al-manfā*] as a literary genre that represents the trauma of dispossession, which continues to shape the collective memory of Arabs and particularly Palestinians. Ghassan Kanafani, Halim Barakat (b. 1936), Elias Khoury (b. 1948), and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra have all contributed in their novels to the definition of a Palestinian identity intimately tied to the experience of physical and emotional dislocation. Central to this literary genre is the character of the Palestinian exilic intellectual whose liminal position has rendered him a catalyst for innovation and social change in the Arab world. In its early stages, Arabic exile literature arguably idealized the Palestinian intellectual's displacement and has represented exile, despite its tragic consequences, as the desired ethical position of an entire generation of Arab intellectuals, whether in exile or at home.

The character of the Palestinian exile as an active agent in the cultural development of his adopted home has figured extensively in the works of Jabra, whose personal and intellectual trajectories placed him at the center of the Arab historical and cultural transformations that began with the *nakba* in 1948. Born in 1920 to a family of modest means in Bethlehem, Jabra pursued higher education in England, and returned to Palestine in 1943 only to subsequently flee his home country in 1948. Following brief stays in Lebanon and Syria, Jabra settled in Iraq. After receiving a doctorate in English literature from the University of Cambridge,

Jabra taught English literature at the University of Baghdad. In 1977, he began working as a cultural counselor at the Iraqi Ministry of Culture until he retired in 1985 (Boullata 214-215). In the two decades that followed the *nakba,* Jabra became a leading figure in the cultural bloom that Iraq witnessed. His name came to be intimately linked to modernist trends in literature, poetry, and art. As an established translator, poet, painter, and essayist, Jabra published *The Ship* (1970), *In Search of Walid Masoud* (1978; Eng. 2000; henceforth *Walid Masoud*), *The Journal of Sarab Affan* (1994; Eng. 2007), all of which established his career as a novelist. An illustration of Jabra's literary experimentation was *An Unchartered World* (1982), which was a unique creative collaboration with his friend, the novelist Abdel Rahman Munif (1933-2004). As a prominent figure not only of a generation of Palestinian intellectuals, but also of the Iraqi cultural vanguard, Jabra was in the words of his close friend Issa Boullata (b. 1929) "a true Renaissance man [who] has been rightly considered a strong force for modernism in the Arab world in the second half of the twentieth century" (214).

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which the generation of Arab writers to which Jabra belonged was imagined, celebrated, and subsequently mourned in his own writings as well as in the writings of other Arab intellectuals. *Walid Masoud,* as I demonstrate in this chapter, constitutes a turning point in Jabra's literary career. The novel, which exhibits features of the *nouveau roman,* depicts the implications of the 1967 defeat on the modernist discourse of Jabra's generation. *Walid Masoud* also

and paves the way for a new literary representation of the exilic Palestinian by moving away from the character of the intellectual to that of the *fidā'ī.* In my analysis, I draw on three literary genres that depict Jabra and his generation: the memoir, the eulogy, and the novel. As I explore Jabra's memoirs on exile, I show how he identifies with a generation of Palestinians whose presence in the Arab world following their displacement in 1948 was associated with cultural and artistic innovation. I then explore Munif's eulogies of Jabra, in which he remembers Jabra as the cornerstone of the modernist literary and artistic movements that emerged in Iraq in the early 1950s. Following the 1967 defeat and the political instability that reigned in Iraq, Jabra, as well as many other Arab intellectuals, conducted a collective project of introspection in which they probed the political and philosophical frameworks that they deemed complicit in the defeat. The uncanny similarities between the texts (memoirs and eulogies) that represent Jabra and Jabra's *Walid Masoud*, all render the novel a significant platform on which Jabra articulates the anxieties of his generation. In *Walid Masoud,* Jabra recreates his mirror image Walid as a Palestinian exile whose intellectual contributions have shaped modern Iraqi culture.[1] Unlike Jabra however, Walid disappears from Baghdad following the 1967 defeat, amidst rumors that he has joined the Palestinian Resistance in Beirut. The literary metamorphosis of the intellectual into a *fidā'ī* in

[1] I use Walid Masoud to refer to the novel's title and 'Walid Masoud' to refer to the novel's protagonist.

Walid Masoud announces thus the demise of a generation of Arab intellectuals who witnessed the collapse of their modernist project. I begin my analysis of *Walid Masoud* with a theoretical contextualization of Jabra's generation transformed by the experience of exile and influenced by literary and artistic modernism.

A Generation of Wanderers

Expanding on Mannheim's concept of generation that links collective age-group identification to historical events, José Ortega y Gasset and his disciple Julián Marías have argued that in the occurrence of historical crises such as World Wars or revolutions that radically transform a generation's beliefs and orientation, one may speak of a "decisive generation." Marías maintains that a "decisive generation" is one that "for the first time thinks the new thoughts with full clarity and with complete possession of their meaning, a generation that is neither still a precursor nor any longer bound by the past" (1970: 100). The intellectual break with the past as well as the vague nature of the future creates a liminal state of possibility and risk where change occurs on both social and individual levels. In their understanding of "decisive generations," Ortega and Marías underscore the importance of identifying particular individuals or prominent figures that constitute a decisive generation. Such individuals, Ortega states, "most clearly represent the essential characteristics of a period," when the "full bloom of a new era" occurs under their gaze (1958: 62). As I explore the intellectual imprints of both Jabra and his fictional character Walid Masoud, I identify a particular generation of intellectuals whose Palestinian identity

was defined by the collective experience of dislocation following 1948. Both Jabra and his fictional character Walid Masoud were the leading figures of a "decisive generation" of intellectuals who contributed to the "full bloom of a new era" in Baghdad.

Deeply affected by the tragedy of displacement, the generation of intellectuals to which Jabra belonged embraced modernism and humanism as defining critical frameworks. In *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (1996), Caren Kaplan explores the various metaphors of travel and displacement that were deployed in modernist literary discourses. As she traces a genealogy of exile in the Euro-American tradition particularly in the representations of European intellectuals such as Theodor Adorno and Erich Auerbach, Kaplan argues that our contemporary understanding of exile is defined by the necessary intertwinement of three constructs: exile, intellectuals, and modernity. As such, in its celebration of singularity, solitude, and alienation, the concept of exile has defined modernist sensibilities and has been considered both the precursor and the outcome of a distinctively modern subject position (50). From this standpoint, the exilic intellectual appears as a "typically male, reflexive observer, educated, fluent in culture and arts, and of course, a humanist" (Idem.). Kaplan rightly argues that the defining yet problematic property of exile, as it appeared in modernist literary traditions, is its favoring of theoretical constructs at the expense of involvement in the material world. She adds, "The modernist trope of exile works to remove itself

from any political or historically-specific instances in order to generate aesthetic categories and ahistorical values" (28). Kaplan's analytical association between the intellectual's exile and his modernist proclivities provides a valuable framework in reading Jabra's memoirs on exile.

In the rarely cited essay written in English, "The Palestinian Exile as Writer" (1979), Jabra grapples with the concept of exile, linking his personal displacement from Palestine to that of an entire generation of Palestinian intellectuals navigating smoothly across political borders and intellectual circles in Egypt and the Levant. In his understanding of exile, Jabra counter-identifies with the status of refugee, a position that Edward Said later channeled in his influential essay "Reflections on exile" (2001: 81).[2] Refusing to subscribe to an identity that transforms its bearers into seekers of international assistance, Jabra represents himself as well as other Palestinian intellectuals not as refugees but as "wanderers":

> If anyone used the word "refugee" with me, I was furious, I was not seeking refuge. None of my Palestinian co-wanderers were seeking refuge. We were offering whatever talent or knowledge we had, in return for a living, for survival. We were knowledge peddlers pausing at one more stop on our seemingly endless way. When in the autumn of 1948 the customs men asked me upon arrival in Baghdad to open my luggage for inspection, I offered them a battered suitcase full of books and papers, a small box full of paints and brushes, and half a dozen paintings on plywood. I was not a refugee, and I was proud as hell. (77)

[2] In his distinction between refugees and exiles, Edward Said states: "Refugees…are a creation of the twentieth-century state. The word 'refugee' has become a political one, suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance, whereas 'exile' carries with it, I think, a touch of solitude and spirituality" (Idem.) See Said, Edward W. "Reflections on Exile," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Harvard University Press, 2000: 173-186. Print.

Jabra's distinction between the status of refugee and that of the wanderer reveals other dichotomies such as refugee/intellectual, and refugee/exile, all of which present a typology of the educated Palestinian after 1948 as an intellectual merely wandering in his Arab exile. Alternating between the personal 'I' and the collective 'we,' Jabra equates his predicament to that of his Palestinian "co-wanderers." Endowed with a modern Western education and artistic skills, these mobile intellectuals are a source of pride as well as an asset to their host country and culture. Unlike refugees who endure their trauma of dispossession as a collectivity, Jabra experiences exile as a detached individual. Exile for Jabra,

> Was not a mere question of alienation, a grouping made up of a lot of uprooted individuals: the malaise was deeply collective and deeply personal at once. One was uprooted as a person, and uprooted as a group, and both seemed to float away by a mysterious impulsion. Palestinians as individuals had become wanderers. (83)

Jabra and his co-wanderers suffer from an existential loss, a "malaise," which interpellates them first as individuals, and second as members of an emergent exilic community. By means of their deracination, Palestinian exilic intellectuals become permanent inhabitants of the border, a liminal space between political and intellectual identifications. According to Edward Said who wrote extensively on exile, this state of non-belonging caused by literal and metaphoric homelessness constitutes a force of critical and creative power or what he calls *secular criticism*. As secular critics, exilic intellectuals embrace a paradigm that is "life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination and abuse; its social

goals are non-coercive knowledge produced in the interest of human freedom" (2000: 242). Despite—or because of—their exilic subject position, Jabra as well as his fellow wanderers are determined knowledge seekers who resort to reflexivity and creativity in order to salvage their shattered selves and "inner essence":

> All of us were, through art, reliving our original Palestinian experience. Every articulate Palestinian was doing this is one way or another: it was the wanderer's attempt to hang on to his vision, to keep the inner essence intact. (84)

Unlike refugees, exiles wander across Arab cities exchanging intellect for survival. They perceive their creativity and critical thought as necessary means for subsistence and emotional survival. It is only through their intellectual and creative contributions that exiles are able to reassemble and preserve their shattered psyche. Jabra remembers that following the *nakba*,

> Suddenly, Palestinian intellectuals were everywhere: writing, teaching, talking, doing things, influencing a whole Arab society in most unexpected ways. They were coping with their sense of loss, turning their exile into a force, creating thereby a mystique of being Palestinian. (83)

With this statement, Jabra portrays his generation of Palestinian exiles as displaced male intellectuals with a modern sensibility. By virtue of their education, their dissociation from parochial identities, and their displacement, Palestinian intellectuals emerge as archetypical modern subjects experimenting with humanist and modernist tropes that enrich the cultural debates of their host societies. Indeed, for Jabra, Edward Said, and a generation of Arab intellectuals, the exilic intellectual's border position and his critical abilities are not only the precursor but also the

precondition for a modern and critical outlook on the world. As such, only the Palestinian intellectual, whose national identity flourishes in exile, is capable of ushering Arab societies into a desired modern state. In a statement that reveals his awareness of his vital role as a Palestinian intellectual in the Arab world, Jabra states:

> Right from the start, Palestinians had declared that their fate and the fate of the Arab nation were interlocked, were in fact one. Palestinians could not fail, except by the failure of the whole Arab nation. But they also knew that so much depended on themselves: on their efficacy as a leavening force for a meaningful future for Arabs everywhere. (85)

In this significant statement that characterizes his entire intellectual project, Jabra describes the importance of the Palestinians' codependent relationship with their Arab exilic societies. Jabra expresses his early realization that the Palestinian identity and struggle are not viable without the successful modernization of the Arab nation. Simultaneously, Jabra implies that the Arab nation may not reach a state of cultural and social maturity without the seminal contributions of Palestinian intellectuals. Jabra thus understands exile as a historical condition that shapes the critical sensibilities of an entire generation of Palestinian intellectuals. Despite their violent displacement, Palestinian intellectuals were able to reinvent themselves as humanist and modernist critics, writers, and artists and assume thereby their position at the cultural vanguard of the Arab world.

A Generation of Dreamers

When Jabra arrived in Iraq in 1948, the country was setting the ground for two decades that will define modern Iraqi history and culture. In the period between the *nakba* in 1948 and the July Revolution in 1958, a generation of young Iraqi intellectuals searching for alternative modes of expression began exploring modernism in poetry and art. In *Arabic Poetry: Trajectories of Modernity and Tradition* (1996) Muhsin al-Musawi explains:

> Soon after the Second World War, another radical change under the rubric of the Free Verse Movement took over the poetic scene, bringing into Arabic culture a new consciousness of great complexity that appropriated both radical politics and poetics, and approached tradition and history anew, questioning almost every issue and generating since then further renewals and innovations. (9)

The generation of young writers and poets debated their nascent poetic and artistic projects in literary journals such as *Shiᶜr* edited by Youssef el-Khal (1917-1987) and *Al-Adab* edited by Suhayl Idris (1923-2008) in Beirut. Iraqi poets such as Badr Shaker al-Sayab (1926-1964), Buland al-Haydari (1926-1996), Abdul Wahhab al-Bayati (1926- 1999), and Nazik al-Mala'ika (1922-2007) found in the *New Verse Movement*, a platform to modernize the classical Arabic *qaṣīḍa.*[3] In their poetry, they

[3] Not only was the nomination of the Free Verse Movement controversial, there were also different interpretations of its intellectual and poetic project. Whereas Nazek el-Malaeka believed in the necessity of drawing on the classical poetic tradition, Jabra called for a break with tradition and an embrace of contemporary western poetic trends. Ahmed al-Tami discusses this debate in "Arabic 'Free Verse': The Problem of Terminology." Journal of Arabic Literature 24.2 (1993): 185-198. Salma Khadra al-Jayyusi discusses the rise and the theoretical implications of the Movement in Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry. 557-573. Brill, 1977. Print. Also, see Muhsin al-Musawi's. *Arabic Poetry Trajectories of Modernity and Tradition*. London: Routledge, 2006. Print, particularly his analysis of Nazek al-Malaeka's role in the Movement.

addressed new themes, imageries, and unconventional vocabulary and transformed the Arabic poetic tradition by re-imagining it at the intersection of Babylonian mythology and T.S. Eliot's influential *Wasteland* (1922). Similar trends were found in Iraqi art associations, particularly in Société Primitive (S.P.) founded by Fayek Hassan (1914-1992) and the Baghdad Modern Art Group founded by Jawad Salim (1919-1962).[4]

In 1958, general Abd al-Karim Qasim and two other officers in the Iraqi military staged a coup against the Hashemite King Faisal II (1935-1958) and established a military regime that courted the Iraqi Communist Party and implemented many policies of the Party's platform. Between 1963 and 1967, Iraq witnessed two other coups that led to the establishing of the Baath Party at the head of a violent authoritarian regime (Batatu: 1989). The political turmoil and the bloodshed that accompanied each coup transformed the Iraqi cultural scene. In *The Live Spirit: The Sixties Generation in Iraq* (1997) the Iraqi poet and novelist Fadil Azzawi (b. 1940) writes about his experience as a member of the 1960s generation [*jīl al-sittīnāt*] constituted of a group of intellectuals and artists who led cultural trends in Iraq between the early 1960s until the late 1970s. Azzawi argues that 1960s in Iraq differ from any other decade that Iraq has witnessed:

> It [the decade] is not about innovation in writing styles as some literary critics and historians falsely claim. It involves indeed an entire

[4] For a critical analysis of the modernist discourse in Iraqi art, see Jabra, Jabra Ibrahim. *Jawad Salim Wa-Nusb Al-Hurriyah*. 1974. Print. and Greenberg, Nathaniel. "Political Modernism, Jabra, and the Baghdad Modern Art Group." *Comparative Literature and Culture* 12.2 (2010). Print.

> transformation [*taḥawwul kāmil*] in intellectual, political, and social consciousness, following the crisis of the preceding models that that formulated a utopian representation of life and the world. (13)

Building on the intellectual projects of the Iraqi pioneers, this generation expanded its innovative project without however adopting an explicit ideological framework. Professing new directions in literature, writers of this new literary generation puzzled critics not yet accustomed to these stylistic and thematic innovations. Their writings, Azzawi remembers, were considered a 'new wave,' 'new writings,' 'protest literature,' 'rejection literature,' 'literary vanguard,' 'counter-writing,' 'non-poetry' (8), among other labels that reveal the literary commotion that this generation had caused. Azzawi argues that this generation embodied, "a particular kind of spirit" [*rūḥ mu^{c}ayyana*] with a new outlook on modernity, mainly in poetry and art (9). The intellectual project of the 1960s generation in Iraq was controversial and innovative, yet remained elitist insofar as it pertained to art and literature alone (11). In their elegies that commemorate Jabra and evaluate his intellectual contributions in Iraq, writers such as Abdel Rahman Munif reminisce on this period that arguably constitutes Iraq's golden age.

In the few months that preceded Jabra's death in 1994, a group of twenty-one Arab intellectuals that included friends, colleagues, and students, many of whom were Iraqis wrote a collection of essays in honor of Jabra on his 75th birthday. Entitled *Angst and the Celebration of Life* (1995), the manuscript was edited and introduced by Munif, Jabra's lifelong friend. In 1998, Munif published *The Ache of*

Absence, a collection of eulogies in commemoration of prominent Arab intellectuals such as Emile Habibi (1922-1996), Saadallah Wannous (1941-1997), Nizar Qabbani (1923-1998), as well as Jabra, whose collection of poems *The Ache of the Sun* (1981) inspired Munif in choosing the title.

The eulogies that Munif edited and wrote about Jabra contribute to a literary trend that is ubiquitous in modern Arabic literature and thought. A cross between funeral orations, memoirs, biographies, and critical essays, these texts constitute an elegiac genre awaiting classification and critical attention. What distinguishes these essays from general eulogies to friends or family members is their ability to offer a platform for intellectuals to express the loss of an imagined cultural community. Indeed, in addition to mourning friends and peers, the writers of these eulogies are also lamenting the loss of a generation of Arab thinkers. Munif argues that these essays did not emanate from a personal need to mourn but from "an attempt at establishing a living and impartial memory as well as an incitement to reading that will achieve positive accumulation and create the needed and necessary memory [*dhākira*], especially at this stage" (1995: 10). These commemorative essays constitute, according to Munif, the nucleus of a contemporary Arab collective memory that builds on the idealism and the defeats of the mourned generation in order to reconstitute and drive a new generation of Arab thinkers. "The Bedouins", Munif adds, "referred to the term 'absence' [*ghiyāb*], not in the context of eclipse,

vanishing, and total absence, but as a temporal unit to signify the sunset, following which, the sun shall rise and light the world anew" (1998: 10).

Munif remembers Jabra's contributions to his personal and intellectual developments. Jabra first appeared in Munif's life as a source of inspiration and later became a colleague when they co-wrote *Unchartered World*. Munif believes that "the main ideas that used to motivate Jabra were innovation, intellectual rebellion, the bond to the spirit of the age and the way to all of that was through knowledge and creativity" (118). Munif identifies his Palestinian friend as the most prominent member of a generation of intellectuals who were reshaping modern Iraqi culture. As he elaborates on Jabra's intellectual achievements, Munif establishes a causal relationship between Jabra's exile and his contributions to Iraqi culture since the 1950s:

> I consider the Palestinian intellectual Jabra Ibrahim Jabra one of the most prominent Arab intellectuals since the 1950s until the end of the century. He dedicated his time to establish a bond between Palestine and Iraq. He also contributed to the genesis of Iraqi culture [*takwīn al-thaqāfa*] and to shedding light on important issues that were the basis of this emerging cultural scene. Since the 1950s, Jabra built [Iraq's] cultural foundations [*al-ta'sīs al-thaqāfī*] through his translations, lectures, and theories on modern poetry. Jabra contributed to the establishing of art organizations and associations that drew on modernist trends and schools and presented a type of Iraqi art that was more mature and more developed than that of neighboring countries. (2005: 74)

Munif imagines Jabra at the level of the divine as he attributes to him the power of genesis, *al-takwīn,* or the capacity to conceive Iraqi culture, almost from vacuum. Indeed, in Munif's eyes, modern Iraqi culture as well as its accompanying critical

discourse would have been unimaginable without Jabra's contributions. Furthermore, Munif's representation of Jabra as a Palestinian revolutionizing the Iraqi and Arab cultural scenes recalls Jabra's self-identification in his memoirs as well as his numerous literary texts. Munif thus reconstructs Jabra as a leading figure in what Ortega and Marías named a *decisive generation* of Arab intellectuals who embodied in their works modernist ideals in arts and literature. Munif recalls:

> It was common for many, myself included, to cross Rashid Street daily and stand before the Barāzīliyya café in order to observe, and maybe hear, those dreamers [*ḥālimūn*] who not only wanted to change the face of Iraq, but also that of the entire world. Among them were Al-Sayyab, Al-Bayati, Jawad Salim, Muhyi al-Din Ismail, Kazem Jawad, al-Haydari, Hussein Mardan, … and in their midst Jabra! […] We used to feel sorry for them for being dreamers, as opposed to us politicians who carried alone the burden of change and who were the only ones qualified for this mission! Nevertheless, we used to share with our colleagues some of what we had heard from these artists and litterateurs [*adabātiyya*] about their desire to change the world! (1998: 111)

Central to Munif's recollection of Jabra and his generation is the allegory of the dreamer. Munif represents the intellectuals he used to admire as quixotic characters that transform the Barāzīliyya—one of the most vibrant Baghdadi intellectual spaces—into a slumber zone or a stage where dreams, fantasies, and idealism are performed.[5] Munif's deployment of the term *adabātiyya,* a sarcastic appropriation of the term *udabā'*, reveals his ambivalent position towards this generation and introduces the readers to the dichotomy of dreamers/politicians that began

[5] Barāzīliyya café was a meeting place for college students, intellectuals, poets, and writers. Some intellectuals called it "The Aristocratic Café" when the café replaced tea with instant coffee Nescafé and imported coffee as early as the 1940s. The golden age of the Barāzīliyya was during the 1950s when artists and writers such as Jabra presented some of their most creative works there. See Fadil Azzawi *Live Spirit* p. 197-204 for a brief survey of the most influential literary cafés in Baghdad.

emerging as early as the 1960s in Baghdad. Munif was however not alone in imagining Jabra as an intellectual dissociated from the political struggles of his era. Indeed, commenting on the centrality of the word in Jabra's oeuvre, the Syrian novelist and critic Halim Barakat has stated that Jabra's novels before *Walid Masoud* had been "novels of non-confrontation" as they had avoided all references to the political struggles that marked Jabra's times (1993: 221). Barakat states:

> Jabra Ibrahim Jabra discovered that the Arab had been subject to all sorts of pressures, restraints, oppression, until he became crushed and shackled by his reality. Thus, he sought to free himself from his reality through fantasy, which has grown gigantic wings; fantasy that he has unleashed while remaining in place. Is this the tragedy of the contemporary Arab, I wonder? (111)

In his assessment of Jabra, Barakat understands Jabra's humanist sensibilities as fantasy, or an escapist intellectual model that fails to attend to the demands of the modern Arab subject. For Barakat, such is the tragedy of Jabra's generation of intellectuals, a critique that resonates with Munif's aforementioned dichotomy of dreamers/politicians. The dreamer/politician dichotomy, as I will show in my analysis of *Walid Masoud,* will mature in the sixties and will burst following the 1967 defeat. Indeed, the shock of the defeat of 1967 interrupted the harmony of the relationship between dreams and reality, or the intellectual and the activist, and forced a generation of intellectuals to question the morality of their word-centered episteme.

The Disappearance of the Intellectual

Critics have addressed *Walid Masoud* from several theoretical perspectives. In *The Theme of Alienation in the Palestinian novel* (1986) Bassam Frangieh examined the novel from a Marxian perspective and maintained that by portraying characters from the Iraqi ruling elite, Jabra formulated a bourgeois narrative that silences the issue of class struggle and curtails both Iraqi and Palestinian revolutionary potentials. From a different theoretical perspective, some critics have explored the representation of sexuality as a dominant theme in the novel (Peled: 1995), while others have formulated a feminist critique of the narrative that arguably reproduces a patriarchal discourse through the representation of women as passive agents in the narrative (Aghacy 2009). Despite their validity, all of these critiques have interpreted Jabra's *Walid Masoud* as a *readerly* and not a *writerly* text. The two terms are derived from Roland Barthes's neologisms *lisible* and *scriptable*, by which Barthes distinguishes between traditional literary narratives embodied by the classical novel and modern texts that emerged in new writings such as the French *Nouveau Roman.* The *readerly* text is the offspring of "the civilization of the book" (Derrida 3), or a literary culture that had consecrated the author as the center of the narrative process and had identified the reader not as producer of meaning but as recipient of fixed and scripted narratives. Repositioning the reader at the center of the narrative production process, the *writerly* text, by means of its reflexivity,

polyphony, and interrupted narrative, has empowered the reader to formulate his/her own interpretations. Barthes clarifies:

> The writerly text is a perpetual present, upon which no *consequent* language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages. (5)

As a *writerly* text, Jabra's *Walid Masoud* exposes its own narrative process by allowing a group of intellectuals to reflect on their own demise and by giving the reader the power of interpretation. Indeed, the novel constitutes a reflecting mirror, a *mise-en-abîme,* a term that the French writer André Gide initially coined and that Lucien Dällenbach subsequently defined as "any aspect enclosed within a work that shows a similarity with the work that contains it" (8). The stylistic strategies of staging a narrative within a narrative, writing a play about playwriting, making film about filmmaking, all "bring into focus the agent and the process of production itself" and thereby reveal the stages inherent in the construction and the reception of the text (75). The reflexive, self-referential, and polyphonic narrative structure of *Walid Masoud* is an illustration of that narrative technique that represents one of the many facets of the postmodern novel.

Walid Masoud begins with the intertwinement of tragedy and mystery in 1970s Baghdad, when Dr. Jawad Husni learns about the disappearance of his close friend Walid in mysterious circumstances. Walid's car was discovered on a border road between the Iraqi and Syrian customs, a liminal space between two variants of

Arab nationalism. In the abandoned car was found a tape on which Walid had recorded what seemed like his last words: a stream of consciousness depicting disconnected personal memories. Puzzled by the content of the tape, Jawad and his friend Amer invite all of Walid's friends to a dinner party and share with them their disconcerting discovery. Walid's friends listen to his voice as he reminisces about his childhood and reflects on his relationships with lovers, friends, rivals, as well as the death of his son Marwan. In turn, Walid's friends and lovers engage in a personal recollection of their tumultuous relationship with him. In separate chapters that explore different facets of Walid's complex personality, each of them conducts an internal search for the personal, political, and ethical, reasons behind his disappearance constructing thereby a polyphonic narrative about the disillusion of a generation of intellectuals.

The novel's portrayal of 1950s and 1960s Baghdad at the height of modernist trends in literature, architecture, and the arts, is faithful to the ways in which writers and historians have reconstructed Baghdad in their works. It was the city where western, particularly Anglophone literature and philosophy, were translated and debated by Walid's Iraqi friends, all members of a rising class of academics, doctors, journalists, financiers, artists, and bureaucrats who regularly challenge traditional structures and celebrate their individualism. It is a circle of bourgeois intellectuals, all well versed in the western humanist tradition and consumed by the necessity of creating and performing the modern Arab subject. In their

conversations and incessant debates, they reflect on the role of the intellectual in modern Arab societies, the importance of promoting vanguard art, and the aesthetic and ethical functions of modern poetic trends. They refer to Karl Jung, Thomas Mann, and Joseph Conrad in their daily conversations as they savor the finest brands of Scotch whisky and French Beaujolais served by domestic workers from the Iraqi countryside. This male-centered modernist discourse implicates women while silencing them at the same time. Despite their western education and libertine lifestyles, women experience Baghdad's cultural effervescence differently and remain underrepresented in the narrative world of *Walid Masoud.* At dinner parties where men debate their latest experiments in contemporary Arabic poetry, women entertain. When one of them expresses her desire to write, a male intellectual flirtingly replies: "Do you want to write Madame? Why would a beautiful woman like you burden herself with the labors of writing?" (179). Writing and critical thought are the prerogatives of men in Walid's intellectual circles. Instead of writing, women listen attentively to their lovers, husbands, and brothers as they reflect on the tribulations of the male intellectual in Baghdad. Women in the novel however, suffer from an epidemic sense of loss, an angst that drives them to sexual experimentation, chronic depression, and madness. That which unites all women in the novel, however, is their passionate and undying love for Walid Masoud.

When Walid's friends remember him, they imagine a charismatic and wealthy financier with an exquisite and eclectic cultural capital that appears in his

fine taste for baroque music, contemporary English poetry, and modern Iraqi art. Walid had also authored short stories that he hesitated to publish, as well as a first volume of an autobiography entitled "The Well," (*Al-Bi'r*) which was also the title of Jabra's autobiography.[6] One of Walid's most notable publications is a philosophical treatise entitled *Man and Civilization* [*Al-insān wa-l-ḥaḍāra*]. As one of his friends dismissively remembers, Walid's influential study reveals his views on

> the trials of humanity in the second half of the twentieth century following the Palestine disaster, along with a daring forward-looking approach that placed its author in the very forefront of…and so on and so on. (57)

When Walid reflects on his youth, he reconstructs a personal narrative just like that of Jabra, inextricably linked to his displacement from Palestine. Jabra shares his full last name, 'Jabra Ibrahim Jabra Masoud', with Walid Masoud, who, like the author, was born to a poor family in Bethlehem. In his youth, Walid led several military operations against British troops in Mandate Palestine (1920-1948) and was subsequently held and tortured by the Israeli military that prohibited him from returning to Bethlehem. Right until his disappearance, Walid had been mourning the loss of his teenage son Marwan killed in a military operation in the Galilee. Walid's political positions led his friend Jawad to believe that he was assassinated. Another friend of his, the psychiatrist Dr. Tariq who has treated Walid's female lovers,

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[6] Jabra writes a second volume of his memoirs in *Princesses' Street: Baghdad Memories*. University of Arkansas Press, 2005. For an analysis of biographical references in Jabra's novels, see Khalil Mohammad Shaykh in *Al-qalaq wa tamjīd al-ḥayāh*, p. 71-95. Sergei A. Shuiskii analyzes in "Some Observations on Modern Arabic Autobiography." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 13 (1982): 111-123. 2011 the autobiographical essays of Udabaa such as Khalil Nuaymeh, Jurji Zaydan, and Salama Musa.

believes that Walid had been suffering from an acute bipolar disorder that may have driven him to suicide. His most recent lover, the young Wisal who is acquainted with Walid's underground political activities, has undisclosed evidence that Walid had staged his disappearance from Baghdad in order to join the Palestinian Resistance in Lebanon. In the absence of definitive answers, Walid's friends could only speculate about his disappearance. In Rebecca Johnson's eloquent words, Walid's friends as well as the novel's readers are left wondering if "Walid dropped *out* of the world or *into* it" (186, my emphasis).

One of the defining features of Walid's personality was his constant questioning of the traditional structures that slow the Arab subject's necessary and irreversible progression to modernity. Walid's confidant Ibrahim, who shares Jabra's middle name, sums up Walid's entire intellectual project and declares that Walid's

> most important task was to foster the new spirit based on knowledge, freedom, love, and a revolt against looking back—all this was a means of achieving the complete Arab revolution. […] I've come to realize he's one of those exiles who'll use that vantage point to shake the Arab world into reexamining everything it's ever thought or made, and to fill the whole world with the word *Arab*, whatever epithets may be attached to it by enemies with all their complexes. (244)

Walid's intellectual project was driven by the construction of a "new Arab spirit," a budding Arab subjectivity that stems from the rejection of the perceived backward of Arab traditional and metaphysical structures, all of which impede the progress of Arabs towards modernity. Ibrahim situates Walid as "one of those exiles" who

"shake the Arab world," establishing a causal relationship between the generation of Palestinian exilic intellectuals and Arab cultural innovation. Ibrahim's statement mirrors that of Jabra when he ties the fate of the Palestinian to that of the Arabs in general. Furthermore, similar to Munif who places Jabra at the center of the cultural bloom that Baghdad had witnessed in the 1950s, Ibrahim believes that

> Walid was the kind of Palestinian who rejected, pioneered, built, and united (if my people can ever be united); he was a scholar, architect, technocrat, rebuilder, and violent goader of the Arab conscience. […] Where you find outstanding achievement in science, finance, ideas, literature, or innovation, you'll come across that exile Palestinian: he'll be doing things, urging, theorizing, and achieving everything that's different. Wherever there's anything worthwhile, involving self-sacrifice, you'll find the Palestinian. (244)

When Munif remembers Jabra, as I have shown earlier, he associates him with the genesis (*al-takwīn)* of modern Iraqi culture. Similarly, when Ibrahim remembers Walid he resorts to a semantic field that also pertains to creation. He imagines Walid as an "architect," a "rebuilder," a "violent goader," and a source of "innovation" and "achievement." Ibrahim also portrays Walid, as well as all exiled Palestinians, as messianic figures who sacrifice themselves for the salvation of all Arabs. Furthermore, Walid's divine qualities become visible in his description as a forger of "Arab conscience," or a man who has given Arabs a sense of self through his writings. Walid, however, was not alone the holder of power; he was indeed a "kind of Palestinian," or a member of a generation of Palestinians who had the power of genesis. The metonymic deployment of the term "Palestinian" in the singular form [*al-filasṭīnī*] first situates Walid's story as a sub-narrative within Jabra's narrative of

exile, and second, places both Jabra and Walid's trajectories in the masternarrative of Arab literary and artistic modernization.

The Emergence of the *Fidā'ī*

As an exilic intellectual, Walid channels Edward Said's typology of the *secular critic* who derives legitimacy from the power of the literary and philosophical word and its perceived ability to induce change. The 1960s generation's "time of dreams" (15) [*zaman al-aḥlām*], as Azzawi named it, was interrupted following the *naksa* in 1967. The defeat of the June War exposed the inherent inconsistencies of the aforementioned epistemological model centered on modernist values. For historians such as Albert Hourani the war represented "a kind of moral judgment" that drove Arab intellectuals to reckon on their contribution to the defeat (443-444). Whether promoting Arab nationalist and socialist ideals, or merely advancing a modernist discourse in literature and the arts, Arab intellectuals were all interpellated by the severity of that political and moral disaster. This historical juncture compelled Arab writers who had hitherto contributed to literature of commitment [*al-adab al-multazim*] to scrutinize their own intellectual projects in search for the roots of the defeat. As they conducted this self-criticism [*al-naqd al-dhātī*], many writers conveyed not only a mistrust of dominant political and intellectual narratives but also, an overarching suspicion of the power of theoretical engagement. The ensuing radicalization of the Arab critical discourse, particularly in Iraq, materialized in 1973 when the Baath Party and the Iraqi Communist Party formed a government of

national unity and announced the beginning of a new era that constitutes a turning point in Iraqi literary culture. In a joint statement, the two parties condemned the "liberal theories and thought" of "reactionary" intellectuals and demanded that the 1960s writers regain their positions as the vanguard of soviet-inspired social realism at the service of the Iraqi people and the spirit of their 1958 revolution. When *Walid Masoud* appeared in 1978, many of these intellectuals had been persecuted, co-opted, prosecuted, or forced into exile. The dream of the 1960s generation that was shaken with the ethical implications of 1967 was put to an end by the violence of the authoritarian regime in Iraq. The setback and the disillusionment that this generation of intellectuals suffered were projected onto the literary text, specifically onto the fictional character of the intellectual. Endowed with exceptional critical abilities, Walid identifies the historical moment in which the literary and philosophical word, as an organizing principle, began collapsing. Following the 1967 defeat Walid states:

> Events have become so momentous that all our faculties have shriveled up [*qazzamat*] trying to cope with them. The disasters [*fawājiᶜunā*] we've suffered can't be dealt with in verbal form; all the words have been pulverized. (274)

Walid's modern Arab subject, whom he had theoretically forged as a sublime figure driven by humanist and ethical sensibilities, was suddenly dwarfed [*qazzam*], humiliated, and ridiculed. The 1967 bereavements [*fawājiᶜ*]—a term that implies disaster, the loss of loved-ones, and insurmountable pain—have created a moment of aporia or unspeakable loss, all of which render the word, as well as those who

profess its power, irrelevant. Walid's disappearance in 1971 or a few months after the death of his son disturbs Jabra's own exilic narrative. Whereas Jabra remained in Baghdad until his death in 1994, his mirror-character disappears, reportedly to join the Palestinian Resistance in Beirut. A few months before his disappearance, Walid hints at this own exit:

> Speaking out is a completely foolish thing to do now, and convinces no one. No one even listens. It's like beating a drum among the deaf. The only courage that deserves to be translated into action is challenging death with raised fists and violence, thereby using death itself to trample down death, as in the death of a freedom fighter [*fidā'ī*], for example. (4)

In both Jabra and Walid's post-1967 world, the word of the Palestinian intellectual in exile is no longer heard as listeners have become deafened by the cacophony of futile intellectual debates. By considering the intellectual's critical agency ("speaking out") a foolish act, Walid dramatically declares the demise of his own intellectual project as well as that of his entire generation of Palestinian exiles, whom he had described in his romantic memoirs on exile. Courage, power, and change, are no longer the prerogatives of the intellectual, but those of the Palestinian freedom fighter, the *fidā'ī.*

The political and moral implications of the 1967 defeat complicate the typology of the exilic intellectual and its inherent idealism. The exponential rise of the number of Palestinian refugees in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon as well as the radicalization of the Arab political discourse in support of the Palestinian cause, have all contributed to the construction of a new 'mystique'—to retrieve Jabra's own

term—that draws heavily on the figure of the guerilla fighter, or the *fidā'ī.* Following the 1967 war, Walid travels to Lebanon to see his teenage son Marwan, who had abandoned his prestigious boarding school and moved to a Palestinian refugee camp. The symbolic act by which Marwan disowns his exilic identity associated with a boarding school and replaces it with that of a refugee signifies the teenager's first rebellion against his father, who had always constructed his subject position in contrast to that of the refugee. The Palestinian refugee camp is redefined as the "forgotten essence [*jawhar*] of life" (211) as opposed to the marginal, superficial, and ephemeral word of the father in exile. Marwan reminisces on his last conversation with his father who had expressed his desire to join the Palestinian resistance:

> When he was here last winter, he brought the matter up with his group, and then with me, too; it really annoyed me. Operations involve lots of hard training beforehand; they need young men who can run hard, jump, go hungry, and put up with hardship. My father thinks he's still the young man he was twenty-five years ago. I told him if he wanted to commit suicide, to find some other way of doing it. He got very angry and we had a big fight; he swore at me and then went back to Baghdad. (213)

In a sober and assertive tone, Marwan inadvertently draws the portrait of the post-1967 Palestinian in contrast to the *wanderer* that Jabra had eloquently represented and that Walid had embodied. Away from books, paintings, and class privileges, Marwan redefines masculinity in opposition to intellectual achievements and associates it to physical strength and endurance. Indeed, whereas Walid's masculinity appears discursively in male-centered intellectual circles, Marwan's

masculinity materializes at the level of practice and performance. As Michael Herzfeld rightly argues, "the focus on the being 'a good man' has transformed into a focus on being good *at* being a man—a stance that stresses performative excellence, the ability to foreground manhood by means of deeds that strikingly 'speak for themselves'" (336). Following that transformation, the exilic wanderer that Walid had embodied ceases to be useful to the Palestinian cause. Following the stormy meeting with his son, Walid realizes that both his paternal and intellectual authorities were severely damaged. Indeed, not only is Walid ineffective as a Palestinian intellectual, he is also incompetent as a father.

The disappearance of the intellectual and the emergence of the *fidā'ī* in Jabra's *Walid Masoud,* constitutes for many critics, a significant juncture in Jabra's literary trajectory. When *Walid Masoud* appeared in 1989, Munif expressed his delight that Jabra has "at last thrust [his] hand into the fire of revolution" (Harlow 54). Munif argues that it is only in *Walid Masoud* that Jabra has realized the importance of writing a revolutionary novel. When asked about his thoughts on Munif's statement, Jabra builds his reply around the image of fire used in his friend's comment:

> And as for my having thrust my hand decisively into the fire of revolution, this may be due to *our having become, one and all, a part of this fire* (my emphasis), a fire which we want to continue burning in the Arab mind. […] And perhaps the highest aim to which a novelist can aspire is to ignite this flame-this revolutionary fire, which becomes a kind of immanence in man's life. (Idem.)[7]

[7] Jabra interestingly adds: "I do not think that this novel is a turning point in my thought and style in any decisive sense. It is a logical extension of my first attempt at novel writing […] Even if a given

Jabra's acknowledgement of the revolutionary intonations in *Walid Masoud* reveals his budding commitment to a different kind of political engagement in literature. By referring to the first person plural: "our having become, one and all, a part of this fire," Jabra announces that he has not undertaken this new intellectual transformation alone, but that he was indeed a member of a group, or a generation of writers who became aware of the necessity of revolutionary action. Furthermore, by being "part of the fire," Jabra acknowledges the revolution's power to set him and his generation of "non-confrontational" writers on fire should they continue to discount it. Indeed, as he expresses his anxiety about that 'fire,' Jabra reveals an overdue yet welcome departure from the character of the intellectual.

The character of the *fidā'ī* that emerged in *Walid Masoud* also captured the imagination of Arab and particularly Iraqi intellectual circles following the 1967 defeat. Azzawi remembers that the Palestinian *fidā'ī* was romanticized in the popular imaginary because "Palestinian guerilla fighters were not part of an organized army led by generals, but were young men like us with different revolutionary ethics" (190). Azzawi adds that his generation was hopeful that "the *fidā'ī* will constitute the nucleus of a revolution that will change the Arab world in its entirety" (idem). The *fidā'ī,* as the embodiment of revolution and a superior

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work of art seems a turning-point in the thought and style of its author, it is in fact (once its implications and recesses are probed) part of an ascending line which can be traced back to his starting point." See Eligbali, Alaa, and Barbara Harlow. "Jabra Jabra's Interpoetics: An Interview with Jabra Ibrahim Jabra." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 1 (1981): 49-55. Web. 24 Apr 2011.

masculinity, became a recurrent protagonist in Palestinian literature, particularly in the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008) and Samih al-Qasem (b. 1939). Palestinian novelists such as Emile Habibi, Sahar Khalifeh (b. 1942), Liana Badr (b. 1940), and the Lebanese Elias Khoury, have all contributed to the sustenance of the mystique of the Palestinian *fidā'ī* in literature of commitment, which began appearing in the late 1960s.

The masculine modes of mourning that materialized in these intellectuals' writings also evoke a destabilized sexuality. As members of an intellectual community defined by loss and defeat, these intellectuals have expressed an elegiac discourse permeated by anxieties about the demise of the nation, the collapse of patriarchal figures, and an increasingly troubled sexuality, all of which are located at the core of the melancholic discourse in which the mourner laments himself. Unlike the intellectual defeated by the emasculating effects of exile and state persecution, the *fidā'ī* is portrayed as the embodiment of an idealized masculinity facing the collective state of powerlessness that Arab intellectuals have lamented in their writings. Emerging from the Palestinian refugee camp, the *fidā'ī* replaces his identity as an exile with that of a militant refugee in order to rescue his motherland [*al-arḍ*], itself a feminine construct. Portrayed as a counter-intellectual, the *fidā'ī* is a messianic figure that salvages his nation from the collapse of the theoretical and word-centered discourse of intellectuals. The revolutionary potential of the *fidā'ī,* has therefore lain to rest not only Walid Masoud but also the Arab intellectual

alongside the modernist episteme he had embodied.

In my analysis of Jabra in the commemorative writings of Arab intellectuals such as Abdel Rahman Munif, Issa Boullata, and Halim Barakat, I have shown the ways in which Arab writers have imagined, celebrated, and commemorated Jabra. The identity of the Palestinian intellectual following the *nakba* was forged in exile and driven by the written word. As a Palestinian exile, Jabra was aware that his salvation depended on that of the entire Arab nation and that the success of his intellectual endeavor in exile would have a rippling effect on Palestine. As it is revealed in his eulogies, Jabra was a leading figure of a generation of Arab intellectuals espousing modernist literary and artistic trends in Baghdad in the two decades between the *nakba* 1948 and the *naksa* in 1967.

Jabra has expressed in his mirror-character Walid a similar representation of the Palestinian intellectual as a member of a *decisive generation* of Arab intellectuals advancing a modernist discourse in literature and art in Iraq in the 1950s and 1960s. The self-reflexive narrative of *Walid Masoud* draws parallels between the debates that occupied the novel's characters and those that occupied Jabra and his generation. Both Jabra and Walid are Palestinian exiles in Baghdad and both were remembered for their intellectual achievements. Furthermore, both Jabra and Walid have drawn their legitimacy as thinkers from the written word and its ability to define and create the modern Arab subject. The significance of *Walid Masoud* lies in

Jabra's ability to identify and literarily reconstruct the moment in which this generation of began witnessing it demise.

Despite the romantic undertones inherent in Munif's portrayal of Jabra, the reader can discern a covert critique of Jabra's political disengagement. Munif represents Jabra as a member of a generation of dreamers [*ḥālimūn*] that are disengaged from direct political involvement. Munif's dichotomies such as theory/praxis; dreamers/agents; intellectuals/politicians, have gained momentum following the 1967 defeat and have been deployed to explain the demise of the epistemological model that had hitherto dominated Arab intellectual circles. At the historical moment when the idealist Palestinian intellectual in exile was no longer viable, the Palestinian *fidā'ī* emerged. The disappearance of Walid after the 1967 war, specifically following the killing of his son in a military operation, announces a transformation in Jabra's literary representation of the Arab intellectual. As such, the 'mystique' of the Palestinian intellectual wandering in exile was suddenly replaced by that of the Palestinian fighter rooted in the refugee camp. In contrast to his early distinction between refugees and exiles, Jabra concedes in *Walid Masoud* that the refugee camp, and not the literary and the philosophical text, is the only remaining site of resistance. The mutation in the representation of the character of the Palestinian intellectual implicates not only Palestinian exilic intellectuals, but also all Arab intellectuals who had believed in the modernist discourse that had prevailed. By mourning Jabra, Arab writers are mourning an entire generation of

Arab intellectuals to which Jabra belonged. More significantly, by mourning Walid, Jabra may be mourning his mirror image and his own intellectual project that fell through following the 1967 defeat.

CHAPTER 3

EMBRACING INCONSOLABILITY: THE ELEGIES OF MAHMOUD DARWISH, SAMIH AL-QASEM, AND MOHAMMAD AL-MAGHOUT

Our birds, my friend, fly without wings
Our dreams, my companion, fly without propellers
They fly over a trap of water and fire, fire and water
No place on which to rest, except massacre.

Samih al-Qasem,
"Take me with you"

In *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (2004), Jahan Ramazani maintains that the modern elegy is one of the few remaining literary and cultural platforms that explore individual and collective expressions of loss. In a time of repressed war memories, genocides, and exodus, Sylvia Plath, Thomas Hardy, and Wilfred Owen, among other poets, have transformed their elegies, self-elegies, and war poems into a site for simultaneously lamenting and embracing an overarching sense of loss and dismay. Instead of transcending loss and moving to new love objects, the poets have established a fusional relationship with their losses.

These mourners, Ramazani argues, articulate their refusal to complete the work of mourning in elegies that seethe with melancholia:

> If the traditional elegy was an art of saving, the modern elegy is what Elizabeth Bishop calls an 'art of losing.' Instead of resurrecting the dead in some substitute, instead of curing themselves through displacement, modern elegists practice losing farther, losing faster, so that the 'One Art' of the modern elegy is not transcendence or redemption of loss but immersion in it…The modern elegy resembles no so much a suture as an open wound, in Freud's disturbing trope for melancholia. (4)

The elegies that Ramazani explores in his study challenge the consolatory and cathartic properties of the work of mourning. Unwilling to overcome their losses, these elegists reject consolation and delineate thereby a literary genre in which they express their resistance to closure. In his understanding of the modern elegy, Ramazani probes Freud's early distinction between normative mourning and pathological melancholia and wonders whether the completion of the work of mourning, which Freud favored in "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), is ever possible. Ramazani takes his questions even further and asks whether any attempt to overcome loss through elegiac writings is morally and politically desirable.

Jacques Derrida expresses similar views about the possibility and the morality of completing the work of mourning. In *The Work of Mourning* (2001) a collection of elegiac texts in commemoration of friends and intellectuals, Derrida rejects the value of "so-called normal mourning" (1986: 34) and argues that the desire to surmount death is a betrayal of lost loved-ones. Derrida thus conceives of the elegiac text not only as a performative act of mourning, but also as evidence of

the author's own continuous yet never completed work of mourning. He argues that the fusional relationship between the mourner and the mourned and the collapse of boundaries between them protect loved ones from oblivion and are thus the best sign of loyalty towards them. Derrida believes that it is only in the mourners that the dead may speak and that it is only by speaking *of* or *as* the dead that mourners can keep them alive: "To keep alive, within oneself," asks Derrida, "is this the best sign of fidelity?" (2001: 36). Therefore, it is only by sustaining a relationship with the dead through elegiac writings that involve "an idealizing incorporation, introjections, consumption of the other" that the dead can remain alive (159).

In the context of postcolonial francophone elegiac writings, Assia Djebar's *Algerian White* (2000) echoes Derrida's interpretation of the elegiac text both as a performative act of mourning in which the mourner resists consolability. The collection of essays, which Djebar wrote in commemoration of dead Algerian intellectuals, unveils to the reader a fantasmatic world haunted by the specters of the author's friends. Djebar initiates her narrative with an overt refusal to relinquish her lost-objects: "I don't believe in their deaths: for me, their deaths are works-in-progress" (218). Also situating her emotional state in opposition to the imperatives of normative mourning, Djebar embraces her melancholia by announcing that she may never conclude her work of mourning. As they reject the distinction between mourning and melancholia, Ramazani, Derrida, and Djebar de-pathologize Freudian melancholia and formulate a new poetics of mourning. Melancholia for these

authors is both the only possible and ethical way of mourning. Only by embracing melancholia and rejecting closure is the mourner able to safeguard the mourned from the perils of oblivion. Melancholia and the resistance to mourn, I argue, are determining features of the modern elegies dedicated to Arab intellectuals.

A few weeks following the sudden death of Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008), the London-based Arabic daily *Al-Quds al-Arabi* published a thirty-six-page supplement of elegiac texts by Arab novelists, poets, and journalists in commemoration of Darwish's life and achievements.[1] Not only did writers reminisce about Darwish the friend and the poet, but they also expressed a deeper anxiety about the fate of Palestinians and Arabs in general following the death of the poet who had embodied in both his poetry and personal trajectory the hopes and setbacks of a generation of Arab intellectuals. The elegies that the poets Saadi Youssef (b. 1934), Paul Chaoul (b. 1944), and Abbas Baydoun (b. 1945) wrote about Darwish all exhibit resistance to begin or conclude the work of mourning and a melancholic embrace of the personal and collective sense of loss that Darwish's sudden death had caused.

The modern Arabic elegies that I explore in this chapter are in dialogue with Djebar, Derrida, and Ramazani's interpretations of modern elegiac writings as a site in which poets embrace an overarching sense of melancholia as the ultimate sign of

[1] "Fī munāsabat arbaᶜīn yawman 'alā rahil Mahmud Darwīsh (1941-2008)". *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 21-21 Sept. 2008.

fidelity to the mourned. In my reading of elegies that Mahmoud Darwish, Mohammad al-Maghout (1934-2006), and Samih al-Qasem (b. 1939) dedicated to Rashid Hussein (1936-1977), Badr Shaker al-Sayyab (1926-1964), and Mahmoud Darwish respectively, I ask similar questions pertaining to the elegists' rejection of consolation and their embrace of melancholia. Specifically, to what extent do these poets collapse the boundaries between mourning and melancholia in their elegies? What poetic strategies do they employ in order to portray their identification and fusion with their object of mourning? Finally, how does this fusion contribute to their self-depiction as members of a defeated generation?

A playwright, screenwriter, and significant contributor to the Free Verse Movement, Mohammad al-Maghout has received little critical attention despite his popularity in Syria and Lebanon. In his poems and plays, al-Maghout deploys political satire in order to delegitimize authoritarian Arab regimes and expose their complicity in the numerous military and political defeats that the 1967 war has engendered. Al-Maghout's protagonists are usually marginal figures struggling against the corruption of the police state and the collective resignation to defeat.[2] With the same somber and sarcastic tone that permeates his oeuvre, al-Maghout writes in his poetry collection *Joy is not my Profession* (1970) an elegy for the

[2] For a comparison between Adonis and al-Maghout, particularly the ways in which the two Syrian modernist poets position themselves in times of political crisis, see John Asfour, "Adonis and Muḥammad al-Māghūt: Two Voices in a Burning Land." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 20.1 (1989): 20-30.

prominent Iraqi poet Badr Shaker al-Sayyab.[3] In this short elegy, entitled "To Badr Shaker al-Sayyab," al-Maghout decries al-Sayyab's past exile and alienation, both of which evoke al-Maghout's own struggle against state persecution and exile. Al-Maghout concludes his elegy with a dark denouncement of the state of the Arab nation and expresses his desire to join al-Sayyab.

In 1977, Mahmoud Darwish invokes similar themes in his commemoration of the Palestinian poet Rashid Hussein in an elegy entitled: "What Will Be Has Been" (1977). Compared to the other mourned poets, Rashid Hussein is the least known. In addition several poetry collections, Hussein translated to Arabic poems by the Hebrew poet Haim Bialik (1873-1934) and to Hebrew Palestinian folks songs.[4] An active member of the Israeli Communist Party and a distinguished speaker and politician, Rashid Hussein was an advocate for Arab-Jewish dialogue, a political standpoint that other Palestinian intellectuals, notably Mahmoud Darwish, severely criticized in the 1960s and 1970s. Forced into exile, Hussein worked at the PLO office in the United Nations as he struggled with poverty and illness. The poet succumbed in 1972 to a fire that burned his New York apartment.[5] In his elegy to

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[3] Along other Iraqi and Syrian poets including Youssef al-Khal (1917-1987), Nazek al-Malaeka (1922-2007), and Adonis (b. 1930), al-Sayyab heralded in the 1940s the Free Verse Movement, an intellectual endeavor that aimed at liberating modern Arabic poetry from the aesthetic and linguistic confines of the classical Arabic ode [qaṣīḍa] as I have shown in Chapter 2.

[4] See for instance, Ḥusayn, Rāshid. *Anā Al-Arḍ Lā Taḥrimīnī Al-Maṭar*: [shiʿr]. 3rd ed. S.l.: Manshūrāt Filasṭīn al-Thawrah, 1976. Print. and ---. *Qaṣā'id Filasṭīnīyah*. 1st ed. Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwdah, 1982. Print. ---. Ṣawārīkh. Bayrūt: Dār al-ʿAwdah, 1982. Print.

[5] Edward Said briefly mentions in *Reflections on Exile* (2002: 175), the tragic circumstances surrounding Hussein's death. There is widespread belief that Rashid Hussein succumbed to either

Rashid Hussein, Darwish portrays the emotional turmoil of his compatriot suffering from poverty and alienation in his New York exile.[6]

Thirty years following his elegy of Hussein, Mahmoud Darwish becomes the object of mourning in Samih al-Qasem's elegy entitled "Take me with you" (2008), which al-Qasem published a few weeks following Darwish's funeral. The shock of the defeat of the 1967 war radically shaped the Palestinian poet. Al-Qasem's first poetry collection *Waiting for the Thunderbird* (1968) reflects his disillusionment with the nationalist and socialist discourse to which his generation had contributed. Although he never left Galilee, al-Qasem was arrested and incarcerated several times, which has fostered his feeling of exile within his homeland. In his elegy to Darwish, al-Qasem reminisces about his trajectory as an Arab poet, who, like Darwish, has struggled against occupation, violence, and exile. Al-Qasem transforms his poem dedicated to Darwish into an elegy of numerous thinkers, poets, and artists that the collective sense of loss and defeat had shaped.

Although they appeared over a span of forty years, these elegies were written by and dedicated to poets who were not only friends, but also valuable

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suicide or assassination. Neither of these claims was verified. About Hussein's death, Mahmoud Darwish wrote: "Rashid Hussein choked in the smoke of his own poetry… he did not find poetry… so he put fire to the recorded tapes of his poetry and he choked." See Darwīsh, Maḥmūd. *ʻĀbirūna Fī Kalām ʻābir*. al-Ṭabʻah 2. Bayrūt: Dār al-ʻAwdah, 1994. Print.

[6] Kamal Boullata and Mirene Ghossein published in 1979 a collection of elegiac essays in commemoration of Rashid Hussein. The collection includes essays by Edward Said, Eqbal Ahmad, and Halim Barakat all of whom discussed Hussein's exile in New York. Boullata, Kamal and Ghossein, Mirene (eds.) *The World of Rashid Hussein, a Palestinian Poet in Exile*. Association of Arab-American University, 1979. Print.

interlocutors. In addition, as they evoke the themes of exile, disillusionment, and defeat in their lament of prominent poets, the three elegists point to the predicament of al-Sayyab, Darwish, and Hussein as Arab intellectuals. Despite their exceptional intellectual and political contributions, the three lamented poets lost their battle with exile and were unable to see their projects of national liberation and Arab unification come to fruition. Furthermore, central to this elegiac rhetoric is the collapse of the intellectual project of the mourned poets who embraced both the Free Verse Movement and literature of commitment [*iltizām*]. The somber fate of the poets as members of a generation of public intellectuals becomes an allegory of the deplorable state of their nation. After establishing a solid identification with their peers, the mourners exhibit a strong resistance to complete the work of mourning and embrace melancholia as a determining poetic sensibility.

Alienation and Exile

Exile, whether forced or voluntary, internal or physical, is a common trope that marks the trajectories of all five poets and subsequently resurfaces in their elegies. The experience of Arab and particularly Palestinian intellectuals with exile has occupied a central position in modern Arabic poetry. Exilic Arab poets, as Muhsin al-Musawi argues, have tapped into Arabic historical and cultural sources in order to convey their modern exilic position. Modern Arab poets have revisited the poetic heritage of classical poets such as al-Mutanabbi (d. 965) and the 'brigand poets' [*saᶜālīk*], for instance, in order to reclaim exile as both a historical and cultural

condition (163).[7] Arab poets, al-Musawi adds, have suffered from exile in their troubled modernity marked by "deformation, depersonalization, obscurity, dehumanization, incongruency, dissonance, and empty ideality" (Friedrich 9).

In their elegies, Darwish, al-Qasem, and al-Maghout mourn their friends by recalling their exile and political alienation. The mourned poets, Badr Shaker al-Sayyab, Mahmoud Darwish, and Rashid Hussein, appear as anti-heroes and marginalized characters suffering from material poverty, social exclusion, and physical dislocation from their homeland. Hussein's vulnerability emerges in Darwish's reiteration of his humble origins and poverty. In Darwish's words, Hussein was:

> A son of peasants from the heart of Palestine
> A humid breeze
> Pure like a sparrow
> Strong
> Generous
> And poor like a butterfly (16)

Darwish imagines Hussein as a Palestinian poet who, despite his material deprivation, is organically tied to Palestine. In his romantic portrayal of Hussein's rural origins, Darwish situates his friend in normative binary structures such as rootedness/dislocation, purity/impurity, and vigor/weakness. The polarized portrait of Hussein constitutes, in turn, an implicit condemnation of his exile that

[7] The Brigand Poets flourished in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic era of Arabia. Banished from their tribes, poets like Ta'abbata Sharran, 'Urwa Ibn al-Ward, al-Shanfara became outcasts living on the margin of tribal social structures. See for instance Stetkevych, Suzanne Pinckney. *The Mute Immortals Speak: pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual*. Cornell University Press, 1993. 119-160. Print.

has rendered him a poor and marginal stranger. In his elegy of al-Sayyab, al-Maghout represents his peer as a deprived and homeless poet. Al-Maghout addresses his dead friend and reminds him of his disappointments:

> And you bend your neck and travel
> Between sullied mud
> And doors shut hard
> While you are certain that the future
> Will burst with a thousand desolate nights
> And voices that cry out:
> There is no one at home
> There is no one on the road
> There is no one in the world (298-299)

Despite his exceptional intellectual contributions, al-Sayyab appears as a lonely and marginal intellectual rejected by his own community. In lieu of an attentive crowd, al-Sayyab faces the void that unappreciative readers and interlocutors have left. The lone poet hears eerie echoes of voices that announce to him that his future will be even darker. In that context of rejection, the poet falls into despair and imagines his remaining days in bleak and pessimistic terms.

In addition to their intellectual and social alienation, the mourned poets endure physical dislocation from their homeland. The deceased poets' exile frames the three elegies and defines them as constant searchers for a distant and unreachable homeland. Darwish reads Hussein's exile as the poet's first symbolic death: "He was last seen at al-Ludd airport ten years ago, then he vanished [*talāshā*]" (19). Although Hussein later settled in New York, his displacement and his new exilic identity have both marked and silenced him and thus rendered him

invisible. Darwish describes New York, Hussein's exile, as a violent space that causes anguish and accelerates death:

> On Fifth Avenue, he greeted me. He cried. He leaned on the glass fence: there are no willow trees in New York.
> He made me cry. He brought water back to the river. (13)
> […] Pale as the New York sun:
> Is there a way to the heart? Are there pigeon feathers in this cement forest?
> My mailbox is empty and dawn does not bite.
> And the star does not shine in that crowd.
> […] Is there a way for the heart? Who will pick up the dream that falls near the Opera and the Bank? A waterfall of needles will invade the dreams that I carry. (19-20)

Darwish perceives his friend's exile as a ruthless and arid city, devoid of willow trees, with a piercing pale sun, a murderous waterfall of needles, and a suffocating forest of cement.[8]

Underlying Darwish's condemnation of Hussein's exile is his romantic recollection of Palestine. In contrast to New York, Darwish imagines Palestine in its natural landscape, as a home where a shining sun, willow trees, waterfalls, and forests abound. The merciless city of exile, which Darwish represents as the anti-home, emasculates and weakens both Palestinian poets. Not only does Hussein's exile forces Darwish to cry, it also drives him to hallucination: "He hallucinates when he rises and rises when cries"(25). Hussein's exile, which forces him into a state of isolation, estrangement, and hallucination, ushers him to his demise:

[8] In 2003, Mahmoud Darwish writes "Ṭibāq," an elegy for his friend Edward Said. In the poem that evokes Said's exile, Darwish seems more reconciled with New York. The city of Said's exile is portrayed as a fertile space that allows creativity and critical distance and not a city of poetic and human demise. For an English translation of the elegy, see Darwīsh, Maḥmūd., and Mona. Anis. "Edward Said: A Contrapuntal Reading." *Cultural Critique* 67.1 (2007): 175-182. Web. 3 Nov 2010.

…And he disappeared into Fifth Avenue or the gate to the Antarctic
All I remember about his eyes are cities that come and go.
And he vanished... and vanished…[*talāshā*] (23)

Mahmoud Darwish is not alone, however, in tying his personal sense of alienation to western cities. Indeed, the travel writings of *nahḍa* intellectuals like Rifaa al-Tahtawi (1801-1873) and Ahmad Fares al-Shidiaq (1801-1887), for instance, conveyed the authors' ambivalence about the western city as both a source of infatuation and anxiety. In the context of modern Arab states and authoritarian military regimes, exile has become the defining condition of Saadi Youssef, Adonis, and Mahmoud Darwish, among other poets who depicted in their works western metropolises as predatory spaces that foster their individual and collective state of alienation.[9] In a polarized postcolonial world, western cities such as Paris, London, and New York epitomized the injustices of a western modernity deemed complicit in their marginalization.

New York sustains Hussein's alienation by rendering the embattled Palestinian poet "Far, far and indefinitely absent" [*baᶜīd, baᶜīd, wa nihā'iyy al-ghiyāb*] (28). As he decries the violence of exile, Darwish indicates the difficulty of commemorating a poet who had been annihilated twice: first in exile and then in death.

[9] Adonis writes, for instance, "A Grave for New York" (1971) a diatribe against the metropolis that he associated with exile, oppression, and western imperialism in Adūnīs, and Shawkat M. Toorawa. *A Time Between Ashes & Roses: Poems*. Syracuse University Press, 2004. 124-176. Print.

Echoing Darwish's lament of Hussein's exile, al-Maghout capitalizes on the Arabic root of exile [*n-f-y*] as a place of annihilation and oblivion and recalls al-Sayyab's continuous alienation with his emblematic sarcasm:

> You wretched in life and death
> Your coffin, slow as a tortoise,
> Will never reach heaven
> Heaven is for runners and bikers. (300)

Al-Maghout's cynicism exposes the tragedy of al-Sayyab as a poet forsaken in both life and death. By denying him eternal life, al-Maghout pronounces al-Sayyab to a permanent state of liminality, of eternally attempting to reach acceptance and remembrance. In the context of absent interlocutors and a murderous exile, the elegy becomes the only remaining space for safeguarding the memory of the mourned poet. The mourning poet, in turn, holds responsibility for commemorating his friend in an elegiac text that dramatizes the death of the poet by linking it to the symbolic demise of the nation.

A Nation in Ruins

In their elegies, Darwish, al-Qasem, and al-Maghout mourn their peers by exposing their material deprivation, social alienation, and exile. The three poets proceed to establish a correlation between their peers' marginality and the disintegration of their nation. For the three mourners, the dead poets' earthly sufferings mirror the condition of their nation itself, which is disfigured by defeat to the point of becoming unrecognizable. Addressing al-Sayyab, al-Maghout wonders:

Do you place a black cloak on street signs and yell: O mother!
Do you draw on empty tobacco packs
Trees, rivers, and happy children
And yell: O nation!
But what nation is that?
A nation that cleaners sweep with trash by the end of the night (299)

In his elegy for al-Sayyab, al-Maghout decries the disintegration of his nation [*waṭan*] and exposes the effigy that underlies its maternal figure. The nation as mother/motherland [*umm*/*umma*] appears in a black mourning garment placed over a street sign, a grim reminder of the police state that hides behind the motherly figure. In his attempt to re-imagine his motherland, the poet draws an alternative romantic portrait of a nation of "trees, rivers, and happy children" on empty tobacco packs. The fate of the imagined nation is similar to the ephemeral tobacco packs that he uses and then discards. Al-Maghout intensifies his description of the failed nation that he mourns in his elegy of al-Sayyab. Not only is the motherland an effigy made of a street sign or of a discarded tobacco pack, it is also associated with trash [*qumāma*], an indication of its deterioration and devastation. As such, the nation's abject nature functions as a reminder of its past and of a glory that once was. In the wake of his nation's demise, al-Maghout pleads with al-Sayyab to hold on fiercely to his death:

Cling to your death you fool!
Defend it with stones, teeth, and claws
For what is it you would like to see?
Your books are sold on sidewalks
And your crutch is in the hand of the nation (299-300)

Al-Maghout presents a grim description of the world that al-Sayyab left behind.

Acknowledging his friend's intellectual defeat, al-Maghout reminds al-Sayyab that his books are no longer sold in bookstores, but on sidewalks where trash and, worse, pulp literature are found. As he condemns the transformation of al-Sayyab's legacy into rubbish and waste, both literally and figuratively, al-Maghout turns his bitterness to al-Sayyab's Iraqi and Arab nation. Weakened by the epidemic state of cultural degeneration, al-Maghout describes the nation as an old, powerless, and decrepit figure.

In his elegy of Mahmoud Darwish, al-Qasem evokes a similar representation of the Palestinian nation as a failed political and moral project. Al-Qasem imagines his homeland as a nation suffering from the void of false promises of salvation. Situating his nation in the pre-Islamic era [*jāhiliyya*], he exclaims:

> It is the *jāhiliyya*
> Yes my brother, in my torments
> In my sorrow and my estrangement
> Do you hear me?
> It is the *jāhiliyya*
> There, roses are rare
> There, thorns are harder, stronger, and more abundant
> It is indeed the *jāhiliyya*[10]

The homeland that al-Qasem bemoans is a *jāhiliyya* nation of lawlessness, ruins, mass graves, theft, and injustice. Borrowed from the Quran, the term *jāhiliyya* [from the Arabic *j-h-l,* to ignore] refers to a pre-Islamic state of amorality during which men had not embraced the teachings of Islam. In the Abbasid era (750-1258), the

[10] In my analysis, I refer to the online version of the poem that was published in Al-Quds al-'Arabi. Al-Qasem, Samih. "Khudhni maᶜak" (Take me with you). *Al-Quds* 30 Aug 2008 <http://www.alquds.com/news/article/view/id/42920>.

term corresponded to an idealized time, when the Arabic language was imagined as unsullied and intact (Drory 1996). In contemporary Arab thought, *jāhiliyya* resurfaced as the playground of modern anxieties about religion, language, and aesthetic purity. In their quest to purify language and the Arabic literary heritage from the impact of foreigners [*aᶜjām*], Arab nationalist thinkers such as Zaki al-Arsuzi (1899-1968), who subscribed to secular trends in Arab nationalism, reverted to *jāhiliyya* as an ideal era during which Arabic language and culture were pure and unsullied. The *jāhiliyya* also appeared in the works of the influential fundamentalist thinker Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) who deploys the concept as an epithet of the modern neglect of Islamic teachings (Shepard 1996).

In modern Arabic literature, poets such as Mahmoud Darwish and the Syrian Nizar Qabbani (1923-1998)[11] have appropriated the term as a synonym of a troubled Arab modernity. As an ideal structure plagued by tribalism, violence, and amorality, Arab modernity permanently scars the mourning poets. Darwish, al-Maghout, and al-Qasem all mourn in their elegies the loss of friends whose experience with exile has weakened and alienated them. Not only do the three elegists mourn their fallen peers, but they also decry the fate of the Arab nation, as a moral, ideal, and political construct. In the context of overarching losses whether those of friends or ideals, a melancholic poetics emerges in these elegies.

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[11] Nizar Qabbani evoked *jāhiliyya* in his famous verse following the 1967 war: "One expression summarizes our cause: we have worn the shell of civilization and our spirit has remained *jāhiliyya* in form" in Qabbānī, Nizār. *Hawāmish ʿalā Daftar Al-naksah: Qaṣīdah Ṭawīlah*. Bayrūt: Manshūrāt Nizār Qabbānī, 1970. Print.

Melancholic Mourners

The mourner's identification with the object of loss and its subsequent incorporation into the mourner's ego is the condition for the emergence of a melancholic subjectivity, as Freud argued in his understanding of melancholia. Following their identification with their peers, the mourning poets' incorporation of their losses subsequently transforms their perception of the world. Suffering from the tragic loss of their friends and their nationalist ideals, the ego of the surviving mourners undergoes a radical transformation that paves the way for a melancholic affect that dominates the mourners' elegiac texts. Al-Maghout, Darwish, and al-Qasem all begin with an explicit self-identification with their friends and subsequently anticipate their own death.

Al-Maghout begins his elegy by asserting his closeness to al-Sayyab: "O companion in wandering and deprivation!" (297). Al-Maghout's identification with al-Sayyab stems from a shared exilic predicament rather than from their intellectual contributions or commitment to the Free Verse Movement. Through the term 'companion' [*rafīq*], which also implies 'comrade' in Arabic, al-Maghout detaches his relationship with al-Sayyab from the political and the collective realm and relocates it in the personal and the intimate. Indeed, the two poets, according to al-Maghout, did not share a common ideological project, but a life of wandering [*tasakkuᶜ*] and deprivation [*ḥirmān*]. Al-Maghout's identification with al-Sayyab thus capitalizes on both poets' acute sense of social alienation in a national context witnessing

consecutive political and symbolic losses.

In his elegy, Darwish identifies with Hussein on several levels. In short disconnected statements that begin with the first person plural, Darwish enumerates all the elements that connect him to his object of mourning.

> We have elevated the wide coast. We have consecrated the vineyards. We have merged in the screams of wild herbs. We have shattered hymns. We have been defeated by black eyes. We have fought. We have been killed. We have fought again, as knights came and left. (15)

Both Darwish and Hussein are Palestinian poets from Galilee who are organically rooted in their land yet producing poetry in exile. The coast, the vineyards, and the landscape of the Galilee are thus the primordial ties that link Darwish to Palestine and subsequently to his compatriot, Rashid Hussein. Darwish also identifies with Hussein's poetic project that combines a commitment to the Palestinian national cause with the modernization of the classical Arabic *qaṣīḍa*. As modern Arab poets, both Darwish and Hussein severed their ties with the traditions of the classical Arabic ode. By "shattering hymns" [*kassarnā al-anāshīd*] of the classical Arabic ode, the two poets have expressed together an alternative vision of poetic modernism. The hymns that both poets destroyed are also political. For the politically committed intellectuals, the implementation of their poetic project would have not been possible without exposing the emptiness of the dominant political rhetoric, particularly that which pertains to the Palestinian cause. Despite both poets' iconoclastic poetic and political sensibilities, Darwish evokes defeat, resistance, and death, as a predicament that unites him with his object of loss.

Just as Darwish and al-Maghout identify with their deceased friends, so does al-Qasem in his elegy of Darwish:

> Together we have read Umru' al-Qays as we pondered on death
> Together we have read the sadness of Lorca
> The *Lamiyya* of al-Shanfara
> The anger of Neruda, the magic of Aragon
> And the miracle of al-Mutanabbi
> Together we have read the fear of Nazim Hikmet
> Together we have read what we had written together. We wrote:
> To our bygone days in Birweh
> To our anxious Ramah[12]
> To Acca, Haifa, Amman, and al-Nasra
> To Beirut, Damascus, and Cairo
> To our patient nation
> And our young revolution
> And nothing, nothing remains except the spells of our bleeding dreams
> And of our time that has ended.

Al-Qasem bases his identification with Darwish on their roles as politically committed intellectuals who write and read poetry. The political and literary consciousness of the two Palestinian poets is on par with exile and persecution that marked the works of other classical and modern poets. Al-Qasem taps into the heritage of Umru' al-Qays (520-565), the quintessential pre-Islamic poet whose famous lament over the ruins of the beloved inspires the modern elegy. Al-Qasem also refers to al-Shanfara (d. 540), the Brigand Poet, whose banishment from his tribe evokes both al-Qasem and Darwish's exile. Invoking the modern poetic heritage, al-Qasem recalls Louis Aragon (1897-1982), Frederico Garcia Lorca (1898-1936), and Nazim Hikmet (1902-1963), all of whom defined themselves as

[12] Birweh and Ramah are the hometowns of Mahmoud Darwish and Samih al-Qasem respectively.

politically conscious poets resisting fascism. As politically committed intellectuals, Darwish and al-Qasem also write for the political causes that cities like Beirut, Jordan, and Jerusalem have embodied.

Al-Qasem, however, pushes his identification with Darwish further. By deploying the first person plural, "we", al-Qasem signifies a collective construct that extends over a generation of Arab, Israeli, and European intellectuals. Bidding Darwish farewell, al-Qasem asks his friend and compatriot to carry greetings to politicians and intellectuals who have departed before him. The long list of male intellectuals—with the exception of Fadwa Tuqan (1917-2003)—includes several generations of intellectuals such as Ghassan Kanafani, (1936-1972) Saadallah Wannus (1941-1997) Kateb Yacine (1929-1989), George Habash (1926-2008), Neguib Mahfouz (1911-2006), Rafael Alberti (1901-1999), Naji al-Ali (1938-1987), Yiannis Ritsos (1909-1990), Alexander Penn (1906-1972), Youssef Chahine (1926-2008), and Suhayl Idriss (1923 - 2008) among many others.[13] At first glance, al-Qasem seems to be in a moment of pure delusion and hallucination about the names of poets, cartoonists, musicians, and politicians who are Palestinian, European, and Israelis. What do intellectuals such as the Israeli poet Alexander Penn and the Algerian novelist Kateb Yacine have in common? How can we conceive of the

[13] The list includes Rashid Hussein, Fadwa Tuqan, Toufiq Zayyad, Emile Touma, Mouin Bseisu, Issam al-Abbasi, Yasser Arafat, Emile Habibi, Sheikh Imam, Ahmad Yassin, Saadallah Wannus, Kateb Yacine, George Habash, Neguib Mahfouz, Abu Ali Mustafa, Youssef Hanna, Mamduh Adwan, Khalil al-Wazir, Nazih Khayr, Rafael Alberti, Naji al-Ali, Ismail Shammout, Buland al-Haydari, Mohammad al-Jawahiri, Yiannis Ritsos, Alexander Penn, Youssef Chahine, Youssef Idriss, Suhayl Idriss, Raja' Naccache, Abdel Wahhab al-Bayati, Ghassan Kanafani, and Nizar Qabbani.

Palestinian cartoonist Naji al-Ali and the Spanish poet Rafael Alberti in the same elegy? In his relentless enumeration of names, al-Qasem not only mourns these intellectuals as individuals, but also as members of several generations of intellectuals who based their work, whether in cinema, literature, or the arts, on a commitment to the causes that defined their era. Furthermore, all the intellectuals that al-Qasem invokes succumbed to state persecution, religious fundamentalism, and exile. By linking his fate to that of Darwish and subsequently to the thirty-three intellectuals, al-Qasem politicizes and historicizes further his elegy of Darwish and justifies Darwish's death as another blow to a generation of intellectuals beset by numerous losses and defeats.

Following their identification with their mourned friends, al-Maghout, Darwish, and al-Qasem transform their poems into a self-elegy that evokes a melancholic sensibility. Freud argues that melancholia emerges when the mourner directs the pain of the loss to his own ego or when the "object loss is transformed into an ego loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification" (249). The lost object cannot therefore be replaced. With his loss, all associated libidinal energy is withdrawn, which leads the ego to fantasize about its own death. In that moment of fear, vanished hopes, and surrendered dreams, the mourners unveil a hidden death wish by expressing their desire to join their peers.

Rashid Hussein's death in exile provokes Darwish's anxieties about his own

predicament as a Palestinian intellectual in exile. As he exposes the cruelty of Hussein's exile, Darwish also decries his own exile from Palestine and senses his own death approaching: "To her official coffin, New York was ushering us" (27). Addressing al-Sayyab, al-Maghout writes:

> My sadness is as tall as a poplar tree
> Because I do not lay beside you
> But I may visit you
> Any moment now
> Wrapped in my white shroud
> Like Moroccan women (297)

Al-Maghout's death wish echoes al-Qasem's final words to Darwish: "Why do you die? And why do I live?" In concluding his elegy, al-Qasem makes a final demand on Darwish:

> And if I weren't clinging to a divine rope slowly approaching
> I would have pleaded you: Take me with you
> Take me with you
> Take me with you…

After establishing a close identification with their object of mourning, al-Qasem, Darwish, and al-Maghout fantasize about their own death and anticipate the end of their intellectual trajectory best by numerous defeats and setbacks.

Palestinian poets Samih al-Qasem, Mahmoud Darwish, and Rashid Hussein, Syrian poet Mohammad al-Maghout, and Iraqi poet Badr Shaker al-Sayyab represent a generation of Arab intellectuals who captured in their works the historical moment that profoundly marked the modern Arab political and intellectual discourse. As they identified with a generation of politically committed intellectuals,

they have defined their poetry as an act of intervention and protest against the occupation of Palestine and subsequent Arab defeats. Marginalization, disenchantment, and exile have not only mapped the lives of all these poets, but they have also permeated the elegies that they dedicated to each other. The dark trajectory of the poets as well that of their generation of public intellectuals mirror the lamentable state of their nation. After establishing a solid identification with their peers, the elegists reveal a strong resistance to complete the work of mourning and embrace melancholia as the final sign of fidelity to their friends. As the three melancholic elegists fantasize about and anticipate their own death, they announce the demise of an era that codified the Arab intellectual as the embodiment of his nation's hopes and setbacks.

CHAPTER 4

"THE UNBEARABLE HEAVINESS OF BEING": THE SUICIDE OF THE INTELLECTUAL IN RABIH JABER'S *RALPH RIZKALLAH THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS*

> "It [Rawche Rock] is not too far, no," I say to myself.
> We only need a bit of disappointment.
> And a bit of loneliness.
> And a little headache.
>
> Rabih Jaber,
> *Ralph Rizkallah through the Looking Glass*

Between 1973 and 1982, the Jordanian poet and novelist Taysir al-Subul (1939-1973), the Syrian playwright and critic Saadallah Wannous (1941-1997), and the Lebanese poet Khalil Hawi (1919-1982) attempted suicide during three decisive historical events: Egypt's swift military defeat by Israel in 1973, the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty in 1979, and the Israeli siege and invasion of Beirut in 1982. These events were historical junctures that epitomized Arabs' collective experience of loss and defeat. The suicide of these three intellectuals was therefore explained as a protest against the injustice and humiliation to which Arabs were subjected. Given this interpretation, each intellectual's emotional state thus mirrored that of an

entire generation of Arab intellectuals deemed both responsible for and victims of these consecutive defeats.

In 1993 and 1996, Beirut was shaken by the tragic deaths of two prominent intellectuals. In 1993, the filmmaker Maroun Baghdadi (1950-1993), the director of numerous films on the Lebanese civil war, fell to his death under mysterious circumstances in the elevator shaft of his Beirut apartment. Two years later, Ralph Rizkallah (1950-1995), a professor of psychology at the Lebanese University and a regular contributor to *Al-Mulhaq*, the cultural supplement published by the daily *Al-Nahar,* committed suicide by jumping into the sea from atop Rawche Rock, one of Beirut's most iconic coastal landmarks. The tragic deaths of Maroun Baghdadi and Ralph Rizkallah occurred a few years following the end of the civil war. In the early years of the postwar era, the Lebanese state began implementing reconstruction projects that several intellectuals perceived as an erasure of war traumas and a silencing of Beirut's pre-war historical narratives. The deaths of both Rizqallah and Baghdadi were thus interpreted as an outcome to the postwar culture of erasure and structures of violence. Their death, whether caused by suicide or accident, was thus rationalized in a master-narrative that recalled the city's multiple traumas and recurrent history of violence.

In *Ralph Rizkallah through the Looking Glass* (1997), Rabih Jaber (b. 1972) fictionalizes the suicide of Ralph Rizkallah and intervenes in the intellectual debate about postwar memory and collective amnesia led by Elias Khoury (b. 1948), one of

Lebanon's most prominent novelists. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which Rabih Jaber simultaneously engages and subverts the narrative framework of the most established postwar Lebanese novelists in order to propose an alternative literary representation of the intellectual's suicide. As Jaber deploys intertexuality in his frequent references to Rizkallah's original writings and Lewis Carroll's novels, he detaches Rizkallah from the dominant masternarrative that interpreted his suicide as an act of protest. Indeed, Jaber explores Rizkallah's suicide in his writings, which convey a melancholic intellectual suffering from a deep sense of loss and alienation. In his novel, Jaber departs from the objectification of the intellectual as the embodiment of collective anxieties. Instead, Jaber humanizes Ralph Rizkallah in his narrative and thereby interrogates postwar Lebanese intellectual and literary discourse. In order to convey the significance of Jaber's intervention, I begin this chapter by exploring the Lebanese postwar intellectual scene and particularly the role of Elias Khoury, whose political commitment to the debate on postwar collective amnesia shaped the ways in which postwar Lebanese literature has been understood.

The Intellectual and the City

In a visit to Baghdad in 1988, the French novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet (1922-2008) announced that there was no room for political commitment in the *nouveau roman,* the precursor of the postmodern novel. "We've moved on from this," he

stated, "we've finally overcome this foolish delusion" (Pflitsch 28).[1] Among those who opposed Robbe-Grillet's declarations was the Palestinian Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (1919-1994) who argued that in an Arab world deprived of basic freedoms, the literary text is indeed the remaining site of struggle. Given this position, Jabra represented a majority of Arab critics who had been preoccupied with the tradition/modernity nexus and who believed that the political disengagement in the postmodern literary trend is the outcome of a historical juncture that is peculiar to the West. Nevertheless, the novels that emerged from this critical ambivalence and apprehension exhibited several features of the postmodern novel, while preserving political commitment at their core.

In the late 1960s, the Egyptian critic Edwar al-Kharrat (b. 1926) examined the influence of postmodern trends on Arabic literature, which he identified as *al-hassāsiyya al-jadīda* [the new sensibility]. For al-Kharrat, this new sensibility resulted from the social and historical transformations that followed the 1967 defeat and its ensuing moral and intellectual crises (7). Al-Kharrat notes that the emerging trend draws on a collective departure from the realism and traditionalism of the modern literary precursors. As such, new voices and a new language began to interrogate the teleological and synchronic structures of traditional narratives while simultaneously critiquing authoritarian Arab states. Tayyeb Saleh's *Season of*

[1] Andreas Pflitsch presents a much needed analysis of the emerging postmodern trends in Arabic literature "The end of illusions: on Arab Postmodernism," in Neuwirth, Angelika, Andreas Pflitsch, and Barbara Winckler. *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives*. Saqi Books, 2010. 25-40. Print.

Migration to the North (1966; Eng. 1967), Abdel Rahman Munif's *Cities of Salt* (1985; Eng. 1987), and Sonaallah Ibrahim's *Smell of It* (1966; Eng. 1978) are different illustrations of that trend in which new literary sensibilities emerged within an intellectual framework that promoted political engagement.

The 1967 defeat was not the only historical moment that shaped literary narrative. According to Pflitsch, the Lebanese civil war (1990-1975) had a similar impact. "Here too," he argues, "dreams were shattered and language lost its innocence"(30). Postwar Lebanese writers such as Rashid al-Daif (b. 1945), Elias Khoury, and Hoda Barakat (b. 1952) have produced fragmented narratives with multiple voices that exhibit a widespread mistrust of reality. Metafiction, intertexuality, and linguistic experimentation became recurrent features of the postwar Lebanese novel. It is through these disconnected and multivocal narratives that Lebanese writers voiced their concerns about the state of collective amnesia in postwar Lebanon.

The Lebanese civil war ended in 1990 with a regionally sponsored peace accord that stipulated the immediate suspension of armed conflict and the restoration of postwar national unity by reestablishing state authority and institutions. The early years of the postwar era saw the promulgation of two controversial laws that shaped the Lebanese intellectual debates in the following decade. In 1991, the Lebanese parliament ratified a law that granted general

amnesty to all war crimes and crimes against humanity committed before 1990.[2] Proponents of the law argued that absolving all war leaders from their responsibilities was a necessary step towards achieving national reconciliation and a closure of the war era. In accordance with the amnesty law, no war crime investigations ever occurred, and the fate of thousands of citizens who had disappeared during the war remains unknown.

In 1994, the Lebanese parliament voted on a bill to establish *Solidere*, a private real estate group entrusted with rebuilding Beirut's ravaged downtown.[3] The project's advertisement portrayed the reconstruction of the "heart of the city" [*qalb al-madīna*] as a meeting place for all sectarian communities that would heal the wounded national body and achieve social reconciliation.[4] The master plan implemented by *Solidere* reconstituted downtown Beirut as a gentrified space that excluded pre-war venues such as popular markets, cafés, shops, and theaters.[5] In line with Beirut's postwar image as a modern city, all physical reminders of the civil war were either eliminated or masked. Lebanese urban planners, architects,

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[2] For a critical analysis of the general amnesty law, see Saghieh, Nizar. "Dhākirat al-ḥarb fī-l-niẓām al-qānunī al-lubnānī' In *Mémoire pour l'Avenir*, ed. Amal Makarem. Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 2002. 205-226. Print.

[3] Solidere is an acronym for Société Libanaise pour le Développement et la Reconstruction de Beyrouth, French for The Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut.

[4] Saree Makdisi offers a survey of the different stages of the downtown reconstruction plan and expresses his concerns about the project's success in "Laying Claim to Beirut: Urban Narrative and Spatial Identity in the Age of Solidere." *Critical Inquiry* 23.3 (1997): 661-705.

[5] Jon Calame and Esther Charlesworth compare different urban policies implemented in *Divided Cities: Belfast, Beirut, Jerusalem, Mostar, and Nicosia*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009. Print.

archeologists, and social scientists were critical of the new project as they saw in its implementation an erasure of the city's historical and archeological identity on the one hand, and a silencing of alternative historical narratives, on the other.

In the first decade following the war, Lebanon was at the height of local debates pertaining to the collective experience of amnesia and reconciliation.[6] The general amnesty law and the reconstruction of downtown Beirut were symptomatic of state-sponsored amnesia, a concept that many intellectuals deployed in protest of the Lebanese postwar culture.[7] Less concerned with the heart of the city, critics drew attention to the city's memory [*dhākirat al-madīna*], without which, they argued, the city's postwar work of mourning will remain incomplete. Historians such as Samir Kassir (1960-2005) rewrote the history of Beirut and that of the Lebanese civil war in an attempt to recover the suppressed layers of the city's memory. This concern was equally voiced in art, cinema, and literature. Despite Lebanon's limited cinematic production, several feature films such as Jocelyn Saab's *Once Upon a Time: Beirut* (1994) Joanna Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige's *Around the Pink House* (1999), and Ghassan Salhab's *Terra Incognita* (2002), all approached postwar Lebanon through the themes of trauma, memory, and mourning. Postwar

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[6] Lebanese writers and activists drew parallels between the disappeared during the Lebanese civil war and those who disappeared during the military regimes in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay in the 1970s and early 1980s. The South American experience was discussed in several studies in Postwar Lebanon. See for instance, Najib al-Asmar in "Mīzān al-Qiwā yamīl naḥwa al-ḥaqīqa wa-l-ʿadāla fī amrīkā al-janūbiyya" in *Annahar*. 24 Dec 2004.

[7] Sune Haugbolle presents a detailed analysis of the Lebanese postwar memory debates in *War and Memory in Lebanon*. Cambridge University Press, 2010. Print.

Lebanese novelists such as Rashid al-Daif in *Dear Mr. Kawabata* (1995; Eng. 2000) and Hoda Barakat in *Stone of Laughter* (1990; Eng. 2005) for instance, were equally invested in exploring the imprints of the Lebanese civil war on the individual as well as the collectivity.

The most prominent critic of postwar Lebanese collective amnesia has been Elias Khoury. Khoury has addressed in his novels, particularly in *White Masks* (1981; Eng. 2010), *The Journey of Little Gandhi* (1989; Eng. 2009) and play *The Memoirs of Yacoub* (1993), the perils of cultural erasure and of Beirut's inability to reckon with its loss and thus complete its work of mourning. Like many Lebanese intellectuals of his generation, Khoury's literary career began while he was an active member of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Lebanese left at the height of the civil war.[8] Between 1992 and 2009, Khoury was the editor-in-chief of *Al-Nahar* newspaper's daily supplement, *Al-Mulhaq.* In the postwar era, *Al-Mulhaq*'s writers redefined the ethos of political commitment [*al-iltizām*] that Suhayl Idriss (1927-2008) had initially promoted in *Al-Adab.* These authors thus renewed their commitment to the Palestinian cause, promoted democratic change in the Arab world, and explored questions pertaining to collective memory in postwar Lebanon. Indeed, under Khoury's direction, *Al-Mulhaq* became a platform for sociologists, economists, poets, writers, cartoonists, activists, social psychologists, and

[8] Elias Khoury reflects on his intellectual trajectory and on the question of modernity and cultural heritage in an interview with Mejcher, Sonja. "Interview with Elias Khoury: The necessity to forget and to remember," in *Banipal* 12 (2001), pp. 8-14.

playwrights, all voicing critiques of the state's postwar urban, cultural, and economic policies. In "Memory of the City" (1995),[9] Khoury commented on the state of amnesia from which postwar Beirut suffers. He wrote:

> Beirut today can be understood both as a mythological prototype of the city torn by civil war, disheveled by death, dismembered by destruction, and as a former Roman and Phoenician city, a city with a past built on ruins of the past. The two perspectives are not altogether different: in ancient history, Beirut was demolished by seven earthquakes; in recent times, it has been razed by the seven major wars that punctuated its civil war. The city remains unstable, if temporarily sedated by the peace pact signed in 1989-which is, in itself, a myth the city may smother at birth. […] The huge machine that is reconstructing and regenerating the city is already wiping out the memory of old Beirut, relentlessly tossing the rubble of the old city into the sea. The city's center, today, is an empty space, a placeless space, a hole in memory. (137-138)

Khoury's lament of postwar Beirut draws on an anthropomorphic representation of the city as a war victim whose physical paralysis and mental breakdown are undermined by policies that mask rather than heal its wounds. Beirut emerges as a dismembered, sedated, and unstable mother whose unresolved war traumas will eventually drive her once more to infanticide. In the midst of the city's interrupted and incomplete work of mourning, Khoury wonders:

> How are we to preserve the memory of this place in the face of such frightening architectural amnesia? In this city systematically ravaged by civil war, the only space left for memory is literature. Indeed, in any attempt to analyze the destiny of a city's myth, it is crucial to understand the difference between the role of the architect and that of the novelist. Although both architects and novelists imagine places, cities, houses, and create them, the architect's media are building blocks and construction materials and the writer's are symbols in language. (137-139)

[9] Khoury's article appeared in English.

For Khoury, the postwar writer's political engagement is equivalent to his role as a conservationist and a guardian of the city's memory and myths. Whereas the architect reconstructs the city with stones and marble, the writer imagines the city in a novel, which he conceives as a site of memory. A site of memory, or what Pierre Nora identifies as *lieu de mémoire*, is "any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community" (1996: XVII). For Nora, such spaces are the sites in which "cultural memory crystallizes and secretes itself" (1989: 7). The purpose of the sites of memory for Nora is "to stop time, to block the work of forgetting" (19). Khoury thus attributes to the writer the power of transforming the literary text into a site of memory that safeguards collective memory from erasure.[10]

By entrusting the postwar Lebanese writer with the responsibility of rescuing his community from forced erasure, Khoury conceives of the intellectual as an ethical agent. As a guardian of collective memory, the writer, according to Khoury, embodies the desired ethical position of the collectivity. Indeed, inasmuch as the writer's life is associated with the city's memory, the writer's death too is symptomatic of the city's demise. In November 1995, or forty days after his suicide,

[10] Khoury also comments on the necessity of forgetting which Paul Ricœur reiterates in Ricœur, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. Print. In an interview with Sonja Mejcher Khoury states: "It is a human necessity to forget. People have to forget. If I do not forget my friends who died in the civil war I cannot live, I cannot drink and eat . . . The question is what to forget and what to remember. It can be an ideological choice. In literature it is very complicated because literature deals with a lot of details." (2001: 8-14).

Al-Mulhaq published Ralph Rizkallah's unfinished article, "Introduction to Misery," as well as several elegiac essays by his friends and colleagues. The introduction to *Al-Mulhaq*'s special issue read: "[…] Ralph Rizkallah died. As if he was, through his protest death, announcing the suicide of hope facing misery, hatred, degeneration [*inḥiṭāṭ*], and banality. […] " This succinct statement sets the framework in which the suicide of Ralph Rizkallah will be interpreted: Rizkallah committed suicide in protest against a collective state of cultural and moral demise. In his elegy of Rizkallah, Elias Khoury laments the sudden loss of his friend and links it to that of Maroun Baghdadi: "Everybody was there [at the funeral]. I will not name them because you [Rizkallah] know who they are. Maroun Baghdadi was of course absent because he was the first to fall into the abyss of the city's darkness" (1995). Beirut, which Khoury holds accountable for the death of these two intellectuals, was also a victim: "The miracle is over my dear. And our protest has become futile. We stood up, we shouted, we told them: do not let our Beirut head to its final demise. We tried to capture the city, but illusion was all we found" (Idem.) Khoury then proceeds to lament the generation to which both he and Rizkallah belonged:

> Is this generation a generation of curses and disappointments, a generation of death and war, a generation of misery and madness, a generation of dreams and nightmares, a generation of ruins [*jīl al-kharāb*]?
> Are we the generation of ruins?
> Has Beirut deceived us?
> She said she was a city but turned into a coffin. She said she was a dream but turned into a nightmare. She said she would be a revolution but turned into an illusion. She said she was a sea but turned into a desert.
> […] Are you [Rizkallah] the innocent paying for a crime he has not committed?

> Are you the sacrifice in the name of a generation, of a generation, and for the sake of a generation? (Idem.)

In his elegy for Rizkallah, Elias Khoury politicizes the tragic deaths of Rizkallah and Baghdadi by connecting them to Beirut's recurrent history of violence. Furthermore, Khoury identifies himself as well as his departed friends as members of an entire generation of postwar intellectuals embattled by defeat, degeneration, and the pain of facing the banality of postwar Beirut. Rizkallah emerges from Khoury's elegy as a messianic figure whose self-sacrifice salvages his generation from the sin of forgetting. This injunction to mourn, or the expectation that the postwar Lebanese writer mourns both literarily and personally his community's losses is a position that Rabih Jaber challenges in *Ralph Rizkallah through the Looking Glass,* in which he reconstructs the suicide of Rizkallah. Subverting the postwar Lebanese novel, Jaber presents a different approach to mourning the intellectual. Ralph Rizkallah's suicide, as Jaber reveals in his novel, was driven by a severe sense of personal alienation dissociated from the concerns of the postwar Lebanese intellectual.

Ralph Rizkallah through the Looking Glass

Rabih Jaber's first novel, *The Lord of Darkness*, appeared in 1992 when he was twenty years old, studying physics at the American University of Beirut. Jaber began his career as a literary journalist in *Al-Mulhaq* alongside Elias Khoury and Ralph Rizkallah before the latter committed suicide in 1995. Following the publication of *Ralph Rizkallah through the Looking Glass* (henceforth *Ralph*

Rizkallah), Jaber moved to the daily *Al-Hayat* and became the editor of the newspaper's cultural supplement. By 2011, Jaber had published eighteen novels. He caught the attention of critics not only due to his prolific writings, but also due to the diversity of his writing genres. Jaber has tackled history as a narrative framework in several novels including *Beirut, a City of the World* (2003-2006), a trilogy in which he reconstructs Beirut's Ottoman history. The young writer has also addressed the Lebanese civil war in *Confessions* (2008), using detective plots that are common in postwar Lebanese novels. Jaber was equally interested in postwar Lebanon's intellectual scene, and particularly in the deaths of Maroun Baghdadi and Ralph Rizkallah. In 1995, Jaber published *The Last House,* in which he retraced the last days of the filmmaker Maroun Baghdadi before his mysterious fall. Jaber produced an intertextual narrative, which weaves facts from Baghdadi's life with references to novels by Yousef Habshi al-Ashqar (1929-1992), one of the earliest and least acknowledged Lebanese novelists who had written about the civil war.

The following year, Jaber engaged once again with a real event, fictionalizing the suicide of Ralph Rizkallah, his colleague at *Al-Mulhaq.* He opens his novel, *Ralph Rizkallah through the Looking Glass*, with the following lines:

> His name was Ralph Rizkallah.
> On Saturday morning 28 October 1995, he stopped his green Toyota car by the pavement, right in front of Dbaybo Café. He rushed out of the car, climbed the parapet, and threw himself over the edge into space.
> Before jumping, he opened his arms as a cross. Behind him was Beirut, before him the Raouche Rock. He was wearing his old blue jeans and his khaki shirt, which he had bought two years ago.
> He was 45 years old.

> And he threw himself over.
> He fell from a height of 45 meters, hit the rocks, and then floated on the surface of the water.
> And everything ended then. (9)

The diegetic narrator in the novel is also called Rabih Jaber, a journalist struck by the suicide of his colleague, Ralph Rizkallah, who is also a professor of psychology at the Lebanese University. Stretching the boundaries of his identity as a journalist, the narrator undertakes the role of a detective who begins investigating the suicide in order to write a novel about Ralph. In a self-conscious tone that exposes the structure of the narrative process, the narrator announces: "Now I know where to start my novel" (164-165). In his investigations, Rabih identifies a few Lebanese intellectuals that Ralph had known such as the academic "Mona F.,"[11] the artist Jad Khoury (b. 1956),[12] the poet Bassam Hajjar (1955-2009),[13] and of course the novelist and editor of *Al-Mulhaq*, Elias Khoury, whose name appears several times in the narrative. Despite his interest in Ralph's intellectual circle, the narrator neither examines nor mentions the special issue that *Al-Mulhaq* issued in commemoration of Ralph. Instead, he meets with Ralph's wife and parents, reads his articles in *Al-*

[11] Mona F. is probably a reference to Mona Fayyad (b. 1950), Ralph's colleague at the Lebanese University. She has written extensively on mental disabilities, correctional institutions, and women issues.

[12] Jad Khoury is an animation and claymation artist whose works reflect a humorous and romantic representation of traditional characters and neighborhoods in Beirut.

[13] Bassam Hajjar was Ralph Rizkallah's colleague in *Al-Mulhaq*. In his poetry, Hajjar wrote about death, internal exile, and existential angst in an innovative and experimental language. See particularly, Ḥajjār, Bassām. *Kitāb Al-Raml*. Lebanon: al-Masār, 1999. Print. and Ḥajjār, Bassām. *Mu'jam Al-Ashwāq*. 1st ed. Bayrūt: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1994. Print.

Mulhaq, contemplates old and recent pictures of him, inspects his obituary, scrutinizes his coronary and police reports, and finally draws a map of the site from which he threw himself. In the narrator's investigation of Ralph's intimate life, the reader learns about Ralph's battle with depression and reflections on personal achievements and failures.

Drawing on intertexuality as a fundamental narrative technique, Jaber builds a multilayered narrative that borrows from Ralph's original articles, which appeared in *Al-Mulhaq* between 1992 and 1995. The narrative also makes indirect references to Ralph's articles and books in Arabic and French, which range from studies on Shiʿi religious rituals such as *ʿāshūrā'* to the representation of Dracula in contemporary culture.[14] Jaber also makes multiple references to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), the latter being the referent to the title *Ralph Rizkallah through the Looking Glass*. The original Arabic title *Rālf Rizqāllah fī-l-Mir'āt* was translated literally to *Ralph Rizkallah in the Mirror* in all studies pertaining to the novel. I have chosen to translate the title to *Ralph Rizkallah through the Looking Glass,* as I believe the latter reflects more accurately the intertexuality that Jaber establishes with Carroll's *Through the*

[14] Ralph Rizkallah's books are *Yawm Al-damm: Mashhadīyah 'Āshūrā' Fī Jabal 'Āmil: Muqārabah Nafsīyah Wa-ijtimā'īyah Li-maqtalal-Imāmal-Ḥusayn*. al-Ṭabʿah 1. Bayrūt: Dār al-Ṭalīʿah, 1997, a posthumous publication, which originally appeared in French under *Contribution à Une Approche Psychosociologique D'un Rite Chez Les Chiites Du Liban Sud ('Āshŭră).* Université Paris Diderot - Paris 7, 1977

Looking Glass.[15] Jaber also draws into the narrative the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935), and particularly his *Book of Disquiet* (1982), which Pessoa had baptized as a "factless autobiography" (12). The result of this expansive and elaborate metafiction and intertexuality is a hybrid and multilayered narrative that imagines Ralph and the narrator, or both the searcher and the object of his search, as alienated characters suffering from an acute sense of personal loss and isolation.

When he wrote *Ralph Rizkallah,* Jaber was still working in *Al-Mulhaq*, in which writers were expected to expose the systematic process of erasure of war trauma, thereby enabling a collective mourning and healing processes. Critical reviews of *Ralph Rizkallah* have associated the novel with that discourse. Not only did critics tie the novel to the ongoing debate about collective memory, but they also saw in *Ralph Rizkallah* a mere extension of the critical and literary contributions of Elias Khoury's discourse on postwar amnesia. In an article comparing Khoury's *White Masks* to Jaber's *Ralph Rizkallah*, Dalia Mostafa argues that both novels are indeed "trauma novels," in which the protagonists suffer from the consequences of a severe war trauma. Mostafa argues that both Khoury and Jaber "seem to capture the paradoxical nature of the traumatic event where the victim of trauma wants to forget the event, yet the only way to move on is by remembering the painful details of this event" (216). Although revealing itself psychologically, this traumatic event is far from personal: "Through its representation of such traumatic experiences as

[15] See *Ralph Rizkallah* p. 30.

depression, alienation, fear and nightmares," Mostafa adds, "Jabir's novel offers important insights into our understanding of post-war Beirut and its inhabitants" (213). Despite the lack of clear indications within the narrative, Mostafa sees the suicide of the intellectual in *Ralph Rizkallah* as being symptomatic of a social and psychological state caused by a failed collective mourning process. She claims:

> Thus, even though the civil war is not mentioned as such in Ralph Rizkallah, the events of the novel point to certain traumatic disorders, namely depression and anxiety which eventually lead to suicide, in the post-war era. The novel detects the feelings of disorientation and estrangement experienced by the protagonists in a city that is rebuilding itself after a long civil war. Whether such traumatic disorders have resulted from living through the civil war or not, the narrator does not give a definitive answer but rather provides clues through the narrative that lead us in the direction of linking Ralph 's trauma to the civil war. (212)

Mostafa's interpretation is representative of the critical response to the novel, which can only conceive of Jaber's text through the theoretical framework that has defined postwar critical debates. In the absence of textual references and lack of clues in the narrative, such readings constitute merely a theoretical projection onto a text that, I argue, attempts to formulate an alternative position about the postwar Lebanese intellectual. Furthermore, interpreting Jaber's novel as a continuation of the literary and critical experience of precursors such as Elias Khoury, runs the risk of silencing Jaber's literary innovation and thus of practicing discursive erasure. In this context, it is crucial to emphasize that Jaber appropriates the narrative technique and themes from his precursors in order to subvert them, thereby constructing a different narrative and an alternative poetics of mourning in the text.

Facing the Precursors

In *Ralph Rizkallah,* Jaber simultaneously engages and dissents from the narrative discourse of his precursors through his systematic deployment of metafiction and intertexuality. The novel recalls several characteristics of *mise-en-abîme* or metafiction, which Linda Hutcheon defines as "a fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity" (1). Both the author and the narrator are called Rabih Jaber; they are both journalists in *Al-Mulhaq*; they are both writing a novel about the suicide of Ralph Rizkallah; and, finally, they are both acquainted with Elias Khoury. The self-reflexive, self-conscious, and auto-referential text in which the narrative and the authorial voices are enmeshed, calls attention to the novel's nature as an artifact. The manipulation of the boundaries between the fictive and the real, the authentic and the artificial, the original and the copy is also the property of intertexuality, a defining feature of Jaber's novels and particularly *Ralph Rizkallah.* Commenting on the concept of intertexuality, Julia Kristeva states that "every text is from the outset under the jurisdiction of other discourses which impose a universe on it." (1980: 105). Thus, the author's citations from and references to his precursors are necessary elements of the writing process. Roland Barthes pushes that understanding further and argues that the "intertext is the impossibility of living outside the living text" (1975: 36). Texts originate from other texts that are the products of other texts, all of which constitute an infinite textual genealogy.

Jaber's awareness of the inescapability of lineage, whether textual or intellectual, is discernible not only in his novels, but also in his essays. In "The Writer and his Precursors," an article published in *Al-Hayat,* Jaber wonders:

> Does the writer know his precursors [*aslāf*]? Does the writer know who are the writers that have given him his vision, his style, and his outlook to language and the world? Literature is imitation and not invention. Literature is tradition. Eliot realized that early. And Borges wrote that he had never left his father's library: his childhood library. (2005)

In his reflections on intellectual legacy, Jaber uses the term *aslāf* [from the Arabic *salaf*], a term that signifies both 'ancestors' and 'precursors' or a combination of genetic and intellectual heritage. His belief in the inevitability of channeling his precursors is manifest in his recurrent deployment of intertexuality. Jaber understands mimesis not as blind reproduction of the precursors' works. Rather, he defines it as the creation of new texts by re-writing the old, a creative process that Linda Hutcheon calls *parody*:

> an exploration of difference and similarity; in metafiction it [parody] invites a more literary reading, a recognition of literary codes. But it is wrong to see the end of this process as mockery, ridicule, or mere destruction. Metafiction parodies and imitates as a way to a new form, which is just as serious and valid, as a synthesis, as the form, it dialectically attempts to surpass. It does not necessarily involve a movement away from *mimesis*, however, unless by that term is meant only a rigid object-imitation or behavioristic-realistic motivation. (25)

Intertextual parody occurs on several levels in Jaber's *Ralph Rizkallah.* As he investigates the death of Ralph, the narrator simultaneously engages and comments on the act of *searching*. The search, as a narrative technique, is common in postwar Lebanese novels, many of which revolve around a question, a riddle, or the

disappearance of a protagonist. The narrator in Rachid al-Daif's *The Despot* (1983), for instance, conducts an anxious search for a mysterious woman with whom he shared a fleeting sexual encounter in the darkness of a Beirut war shelter. The search is also a dominant theme in Elias Khoury's work, particularly in *White Masks*. In *Yalo* (2002; Eng. 2009), the narrator probes his repressed memories as he is forced to confess crimes he does not remember committing. Khoury traces memories in *Gate of the Sun* (1998; Eng. 2004), a novel in which he portrays the Palestinians' experience of displacement following the *nakba.* Khoury built this novel on several interviews that he and a group of researchers had conducted in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.[16]

Appropriating the search as a theme and a narrative technique, the narrator in *Ralph Rizkallah* decides to investigate Ralph's suicide by interrogating at first his own reflection in the mirror:

> In June 1996, approximately eight months after his death, I decided to start looking for him. Just like that, at a whim, I found myself looking at the reflection of my face in the mirror and ignoring the black space that appears behind my ears, saying to myself: I will find him. […]
> I asked: Where do you search for a dead man?
> I answered: Among his family, his acquaintances.
> I asked: Where else?
> I answered: In his pictures.
> - And do you know of any other place to look for him?
> - I do, in his writings. (37)

[16] In the novel's postscript, Khoury writes: "This novel would not have been possible without dozens of men and women in the [Palestinian refugee] camps of Burj al-Barajneh, Chatila, Mar Elias, an Ayn al-Hilwe, all of whom opened to me the doors to their stories and took me on a journey in their dreams and memories". Khoury also thanks seven fieldworkers who assisted him in conducting these interviews. See Khūrī, Ilyās. *Bāb Al-Shams: Riwāyah*. 1st ed. Bayrūt: Dār Al-Adab, 1998. Print.

In one of his many dialogues with his reflection in the mirror, the narrator reveals the nature of his investigation. Not only will he interrogate Ralph's family and friends, but he will also search for answers in texts that are either by or about the suicidal intellectual. In the first phase of his investigation, the narrator visits Ralph's wife, Hala, and makes a revealing announcement: "I told her that I wasn't looking for secrets and that I don't believe that people commit suicide for a specific reason" (43). With this statement, Jaber begins by deconstructing the narrative theme of his precursors by a self-defeating declaration about the purpose of the search for knowledge and truth. Indeed, from the outset, the author dismisses the unveiling of secrets as a desired goal and voids the intellectual's suicide from any meaning.

The narrator proceeds to expose interrogation as a narrative tool. About his meeting with Ralph's wife, the narrator reports:

> I stared at her. Now I shall know.
> I did not say to her: tell me.
> I will never say that to anyone.
> The moment you start asking, you are no longer free.
> And without your freedom, your writing is dirt and deceit.
> I know that very well. And because I know it, I live underground. (81)

The narrator engages in a peculiar type of interrogation in which he does not ask questions. Not only does the narrator shy away from questions, he also denounces the danger inherent in the process of asking: "The moment you start asking, you are no longer free." Speech solicitation, from his perspective, is "dirt and deceit" and thus the most abhorrent form of search. Instead of interrogating, the narrator reads.

The narrator will learn the truth about Ralph's suicide just by staring at his widow, thereby replacing interrogation with physiognomy. As such, reading facial expressions becomes the interrogator's only valid tool. The narrator, however, does not reject the value of the search entirely; he merely subverts it and searches for truth not in the spoken word, but in the silence inherent in the widow's face. His simultaneous espousal and condemnation of the interview as an investigation method operates in this context as a commentary on the theme of the search, which dominates the works of his precursors such as Elias Khoury in *Gate of the Sun.*

Jaber resorts to parody in order to deconstruct the very purpose of intellectual interventions. Instead of speech, Jaber promotes silence as an intellectual framework. He summons Ralph to the narrative by citing one of his posthumous articles entitled, "The Eloquence of Silence," in which Ralph writes:

> You did not listen, you who have written to the echoes of the void within you…
> […] All you have to do is sit…
> Keep silent. Do not write…
> For writing, as I have stated, is not revealing …
> Arabs have said: *Eloquence lies in succinctness*
> In my opinion, it is more accurate to say that eloquence is in silence. Have you not read the Talmud: *If speech is silver, then silence is gold*.
> *Eloquence is in silence*, as Pascal once said. (20)

The narrator is struck by Ralph's unfinished article, in which the latter advocates silence as a desired ethical position: "For writing is not revealing" [*lā tunbi'*]. Ralph's use of the rare verb *tunbi'* [from *anba'a*] recalls Abu Tammam's (788-845) famous verse, in which the Abbasid poet favors the sword over the written word: "*Al-sayf*

aṣḍaq inbā'an min al-kutub" [The sword reveals truth more than books]. Ralph's intertextual reference acknowledges Abu Tammam as a precursor and simultaneously subverts his wisdom when he implies that it is not the sword, but in fact silence that is truthful. In order to justify his fascination with silence, Ralph resorts again to his precursors as he recalls Arab dictums, Jewish scriptures, and Renaissance scientists. Just as Ralph uses intertexuality in order to challenge the power of the written word and profess discursive silence, so does Rabih Jaber the author. In his reference to Ralph's fertile and multilayered text, Jaber adds additional layers to his own narrative. Indeed, by weaving Ralph's denunciation of speech and the written word into his text, Jaber comments on the value of silence in his own intellectual environment. By undermining the power of speech and writing, Jaber addresses precursors such Elias Khoury, who have written extensively on the power of the writer and word. The multi-layered subversion of techniques employed by his literary precursors, whether contemporary or ancient, is by no means an act of erasure. To retrieve Hutcheon's words, it is "a new form, which is just as serious and valid, as a synthesis, as the form, it dialectically attempts to surpass"(25). By voiding the process of the search from its meaning and calling for discursive silence, Jaber detaches his novel from the dominant paradigm that understands the suicide of the intellectual as an ethical standpoint. By dismissing the view that attributes to the commemorative text an ethical dimension, Jaber proposes an alternative literary approach to the suicide of the intellectual.

Reflections of Ralph

As the narrator conducts his unconventional investigation into Ralph's suicide, he delves into Ralph's past by exploring pictures and essays that the suicidal intellectual had left behind. The narrator learns that Ralph's adolescence was shaken by the suicide of his young aunt Lodi, and that he had pursued his studies in psychology in order to understand the reasons why individuals commit suicide (72). The narrator gradually realizes that the subject of his search was a melancholic man deeply unsettled by existential angst that appears in his lament of youth and the human body. In the official police report, Ralph's brother states that Ralph committed suicide for reasons that concern him alone [*nājima ᶜan shakhṣihi huwa*] (164). As he examines Ralph's contributions to *Al-Mulhaq*, the narrator notices an article in which Ralph shares with his readers a startling discovery. Ralph's quoted passage reads:

> "You suddenly realize—one day, just like that, simply, without warning—that you have reached forty. This was the first of many discoveries. […] I discovered, for instance, that anyone over forty has to run clinical tests in order to determine the level of cholesterol, diabetes etc. in his blood. I also learned that the increase of cholesterol level in blood might eventually clot heart arteries, which may cause a heart attack and lead to death. Unfortunately, however, one can foresee that problem and adjourn death by conducting an open-heart surgery in which the clotted artery is replaced by another vein etched from the leg. […] In the United States, however, surgeons prefer to replace the clotted artery that feeds the muscles with that of a pig…
>
> The scene has also become so pale after I suddenly realized that life has spat out [*lafaẓat*] men of my generation [*abnā' jīlī*] to the city's seashore…to the Manara Corniche.[17] At dawn, I run into them—the un-dead [*al-lā-mayyitīn*]—

[17] Manara Corniche is Beirut's seashore walkway, a popular space for promenades and exercise. It's also a short walk from the Rawche Rock from which Ralph Rizkallah later committed suicide.

> jogging or so we all think… They remembered that humans have bodies that shrivel… They suddenly realized the thickness of the flesh that pulls them down and the unbearable heaviness of being." (27-28)

In this passage, Ralph returns to the theme of blood that had occupied him earlier in his studies about Shiʿi religious rituals during *ʿāshūrā'* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. In the Shiʿi ritual of the holy month of Muharram, in which some believers practice self-flagellation as a means to reenact the suffering of Imam Hussein, the gushing blood is cathartic and a means to regenerate life in a body worn down by sin and pain. Blood is also vital in the legend of Dracula, the vampire who sucks the blood of victims to rejuvenate and prolong his life. At forty, however, Ralph is shaken by the realization that blood, which once was equivalent to life, has become illness and poison. Because of their physical demise, life has ejected Ralph and his generation to the Corniche, the city's coastal periphery. Two meanings are associated with the verb eject [*lafaẓa*] in Arabic: whereas the first meaning refers to the act of spitting out an abject matter, the second pertains to utterance and pronunciation. Thus, Ralph believes that life has pronounced a slow death upon him and his generation. He identifies this process as the "unbearable heaviness of being," in homage to Milan Kundera's *Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984).

Ralph's association of the term "my generation" [*abnā' jīlī*] with the neologism "un-dead" [*al-lā-mayyitīn*] is an eerie reference to *The Un-Dead,* the title Bram Stoker had originally chosen for *Dracula.* By linking members of his generation to predictable illnesses, abject pigs, and mindless jogging rituals, Ralph

constructs a new profile of the postwar Lebanese generation. De-politicized and de-historicized, Ralph's generation represents merely a group of people united by a simple age threshold and a collective fixation about ageing. Deploying, in turn, textual parody, Ralph thereby strips members of his generation from significant political identities such as the "1960s generation" [*jīl al-sittīnāt*] with which postwar Lebanese intellectuals had identified. Ralph's understanding of his generation is also strikingly different from "the generation of ruins" [*jīl al-kharāb*] that Elias Khoury will later lament in his elegy of Ralph.

Ralph's anxiety about his physical demise overlaps with an acute sense of isolation. In his conversations with Ralph's widow, Hala, the narrator discovers that before his suicide, Ralph had begun a gradual fall into depression. The world, according to Ralph, "was a forest full of evil people," in which "he no longer sees one familiar face" (175). Ralph's estrangement had reached its peak: "No matter where he goes, he only sees strangers. Even friends are strangers. At home, at work, on the street, at school, as if they are not, as if he is not, as if…"(ibid.) In the absence of companionship, Ralph falls into loneliness and a savage sociality only found among wild animals. As he inspects a picture in which Ralph poses next to a polar bear in a zoo, the narrator becomes curious about bears and about Ralph's interest in them. In order to decipher Ralph's mysterious affinity to bears, the narrator resorts to animal encyclopedias and learns that

> The bears' faculty of expression is very poor and primitive. Zoologists have thus classified them as some of the most dangerous wild animals because

> trainers cannot interpret their expression. Unlike other animals, bears do not know how to express their feelings. […] Bears in general are the loneliest creatures in the world. Polar bears in particular live in absolute loneliness. They do not establish any connection with each other except in fights. (119-124)

When the narrator examines Ralph's picture with the bear, he sees two faces of the same savage and lonely creature. Ralph had mentally exited his world, the "forest full of evil people," and joined a new sociality in the wild. Just like the polar bear, Ralph had been unable to communicate to the world his emotional state and was thus banished into a savage and lonely exile. In such an environment, where emotion and speech are muted, what becomes of writing and intellectual interventions? One week before his suicide, the narrator explains, Ralph expresses his disillusionment about writing:

> During his [Ralph] last visit to *Al-Mulhaq,* Bassam Hajjar[18] asked him if he was going to hand in something to them, i.e. to *Al-Mulhaq.* Like a child, Ralph waved his hand in the air and said that all of this was meaningless. He mumbled a few words and left in a rush. (175)

Just like the polar bear who cannot express himself to his outer world, Ralph waves unintelligible signs about his apathy towards writing, which became no longer valid or credible. Having lost the faculty of speech and the ability to express himself, the suicidal writer avoids *Al-Mulhaq*, the postwar Lebanese intellectual

[18] The same year that Ralph Rizkallah committed suicide, Hajjar wrote: "For forty years, I have been living in a coastal city that does not resemble cities in any way. In order to live in the city that I desire, I have deserted everything outside my little apartment. The only thing that I have created is perhaps an illusion that I live in this omitted space. I experience what I wish only mentally and in the capacity that my body allows." See a collection of poems in commemoration of Hajjar. See Bayḍūn, ʿAbbās. *Biṭāqah Li-shakhṣayn :Shiʿr*. al-Ṭabʿah 1. Bayrūt: Dār al-Sāqī, 2010. Print.

space that attributes to the word—particularly to the written word—the power of achieving collective salvation. Towards the end of his search, the narrator reaches the following conclusion about the site from which Ralph committed suicide:

> "It [Rawche Rock] is not too far, no," I say to myself.
> We only need a bit of disappointment.
> And a bit of loneliness.
> And a little headache. (152)

Ralph's suicide is therefore neither an act of protest, nor a symptom of a postwar collective psychic condition. Neither secretive nor mystical, the intellectual's suicide is merely an incident caused by the intertwinement of personal alienation and physical ailments. If Ralph Rizkallah, the writer at *Al-Mulhaq*, committed suicide for personal reasons, what is the profile of the intellectual that the narrator and, by extension, the author of *Ralph Rizkallah*, reveal?

The Narrator through the Looking Glass

The narrator's motives for conducting his unconventional search remain unclear throughout the novel. Early on in his search, the narrator announces that he is not looking for secrets and that he does not believe people commit suicide for a reason. Furthermore, the narrator and his object of search were not friends, but merely acquaintances who had met a few times at *Al-Mulhaq.* The narrator remembers his last awkward encounter with Ralph: "Ralph died before I read one article by him. This is probably why I looked down when we last met at the entrance of *Al-Nahar*" [the newspaper that issues *Al-Mulhaq*] (23). Not only had the narrator

not known Ralph as a friend, but he had also not known him as an intellectual. If neither *Al-Mulhaq* nor the intellectual circle that surrounds it unites the narrator and Ralph, what is the nature of the narrator's identification with Ralph? It becomes gradually clear to the reader that the narrator identifies with Ralph, not by means of their intellectual association, but through texts, particularly Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass.*

Upon reading "Introduction to Misery," Ralph's posthumous article in *Al-Mulhaq,* the narrator is struck by Ralph's multiple references to *Alice in Wonderland*. An avid reader of Carroll, the narrator exclaims: "If I only knew that he [Ralph] liked *Alice in Wonderland*! If only!" (23). The narrator begins identifying with Ralph the moment he realizes the influence of Lewis Carroll's novels on Ralph's writings. From that moment, the mirror, or the looking glass, appears more than fifty times in the novel and emerges as the novel's principal metaphor. In a close and comparative reading of *Ralph Rizkallah* and Carroll's novels, Sobhi Boustani rightly remarks that "the narrator exploits the mirror metaphorically in order to establish a similarity between three journeys: that of Alice, that of the narrator in search for Ralph Rizkallah, and that of the latter—through his suicide—to the afterlife" (90). The narrator reflects on the function of the mirror:

> In his first novel, Carroll invented a secret underground world, a world of wonders to which Alice arrived only after she fell into a rabbit's hole. In the second novel however, we do not access this world through a hole in the ground but through a glass surface, that resembles water. Because we see ourselves in glass. In water too. (73)

As such, the mirror that led Alice to the underworld is similar to the bathroom mirror in which the narrator contemplates himself. Both mirrors are equivalent to the mirror-like water in which Ralph jumped. Indeed, Alice's mirror emerges as the only space in which the narrator can identify with his object of search. The narrator stretches the boundaries of identification, almost fusing with Ralph himself. Indeed, when the narrator looks at himself in the mirror, he sees Ralph and when he looks at Ralph's pictures, he sees himself. In a moment of fusion between both Ralph and the narrator, the polar bear, or Ralph's alter-ego, emerges:

> And now,
> Bear facing bear.
> As if facing a mirror.
> I wore my sandals.
> I left the book open on the table.
> I walked outside.
> In a white desert, a polar bear walks in sandals. (126)

The narrator however pushes his identification with Ralph further and deploys it as a means not only to get to know and learn more about his object of search, but also to resignify him and subsequently appropriate him entirely. As he identifies with Ralph, the narrator exposes himself to the reader through his self-portrayal as a marginal intellectual living in utmost isolation. The narrator's marginality emerges in his weak health, his social seclusion, and the absence of intellectual interlocutors. The narrator struggles with many illnesses, such as migraines and ulcers, prompted by an intolerance to light and certain foods and his inability to navigate in the social

world (33). As a remedy to his physical weaknesses, the narrator consumes painkillers and tranquilizers. The sickly character admits:

> I was born in 1972.
> But I have an old head over my shoulders.
> I think that in the last ten years, I have taken Aspirin pills enough to kill a blue whale. (27)

The narrator's self-identification in these terms echoes Ralph's own fixation about his ageing body and the deterioration of his blood. Both Ralph and the narrator represent the intellectual in a register that is strikingly dissimilar to the ways in which the figure of the intellectual had been imagined. Indeed, the sickly intellectual that Ralph and the narrator embody contradicts the powerful figure that Elias Khoury evokes in his elegy of Ralph Rizkallah, particularly when he asks: "Are you the sacrifice in the name of a generation?" No longer a messianic figure carrying the crucifix of his generation's failures, the intellectual as Jaber and Rizkallah imagine him is frail, mortal, and socially withdrawn.

The narrator's living conditions contribute to his portrayal as a journalist and a novelist living in a self-imposed social isolation. Recalling the habitat of a polar bear, the narrator lives in a "cave" (64), which is "seven steps underground" in a small windowless storage room of a residential building (11). The dark and humid rented room that is lit by one bulb only has one bed and one chair. The narrator also has a sink with a small mirror in which he speaks to his reflection and to that of Ralph. The narrator does not own a car and thus uses the bus, the cheapest public

transportation in Lebanon. Every time he feels the danger of being drawn into conversation by another passenger, the narrator breaks into song:

> Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
> Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
> All the king's horses and all the king's men
> Couldn't put Humpty in his place again. (51-52)

As he performs this lullaby borrowed from the English folklore, the narrator alienates other passengers and reenacts his detachment from his surrounding. The narrator's performance of estrangement parodies the postwar intellectual whose discourse about the role of the writer is not only incongruous, but also exclusive and alienating to Lebanese readers.

The narrator's cultural background is different from that of the writers who contribute to the *Al-Mulhaq.* Unlike Elias Khoury and many other intellectuals who write in *Al-Mulhaq*, the narrator holds a degree in science from the American University of Beirut and is not proficient in French. In order to understand Ralph's writings in French, the narrator resorts to another text, the French-Arabic dictionary (99), and thus exhibits another sign of distinction from the intellectual circle in which he navigates. When asked about his work at *Al-Mulhaq,* the narrator admits that it is by mere chance [*innahā al-ṣuḍfa*] that he works there. By refusing to attribute any importance to his work at *Al-Mulhaq*, the narrator not only demystifies *Al-Mulhaq* as an institution but also as a platform for the intellectual project that Elias Khoury defends in his articles. The narrator's demystification of *Al-Mulhaq* announces his condemnation of the purpose of journalistic writing altogether as he

compares writing to newspapers to prostitution: "Then I decided not to write for newspapers much. Just as a spoiled whore who decides one day to welcome only the most handsome of men" (24). Not only does the narrator equate writing in newspapers to prostitution, he also denounces, as Ralph did in "Eloquence of Silence," intellectual interventions as a desirable ethical standpoint. In a recurrent instance in which he fuses fantasy with reality, the narrator imagines the following scene:

> One day my landlord will walk into my room and find out that I have turned into a giant fungus.
> At least fungi do not suffer from migraines.
> I wonder why not.
> Maybe because they do not have heads. (18)

The headless fungus-like intellectual who is at the core of the narrator's fantasy is different from the intellectual in postwar Lebanese intellectual circles. Indeed, unlike the intellectual whose written word induces change, the new intellectual that emerges from the narrator's reappropriation of Ralph is unsettling. The young intellectual lives in complete social and intellectual isolation. In his self-imposed exile, the intellectual appears as a lone sickly figure both alienating and alienated by his sociality. In the absence of interlocutors, the intellectual disengages from the dominant discourse that defines the Lebanese intellectual scene and transforms the cultivation of collective memory into a thorough analysis of the suicidal intellectual's emotional state.

Rabih Jaber's *Ralph Rizkallah through the Looking Glass* appeared in an intellectual scene preoccupied with the exploration of collective amnesia in postwar Lebanon. In an environment that attributes to the intellectual the power of change through discourse, the suicide of Ralph Rizkallah was interpreted as a protest against cultural erasure. In *Ralph Rizqallah,* Jaber resorts to intertexuality, particularly parody, in order to present a narrative that simultaneously echoes and transgresses that of his precursors. Jaber builds his novel on the theme of the search, which he deconstructs and redefines. As he undermines the search for truth as a valuable narrative technique, Jaber detaches his novel from the dominant discourse that understands the suicide of the intellectual as an act of protest. Jaber's literary approach suggests that Ralph did not throw himself from Beirut's most iconic landmark in protest of the city's postwar state of amnesia, but for reasons that pertain only to his feelings of emotional and social isolation [*nājima ᶜan shakhṣihi huwa*].

The portrait of the new intellectual that emerges from the narrator's search for Ralph is strikingly different from the intellectual that postwar Lebanese writers had imagined in their literary and critical writings. Indeed, Jaber redefines Ralph not as a messianic figure or as an agent of mourning, but as a lone, secluded, and marginal writer disengaged from the burden of the dominant intellectual discourse. The intellectual is therefore not objectified as a site of memory, but instead humanized as a man consumed by a personal narrative of loss and disillusionment.

Furthermore, in his depiction of Ralph, Jaber also formulates a critique of Ralph's generation, which Elias Khoury had defined as the 'generation of ruins.' Jaber voids the concept of 'generation' from its historical and ideological associations and restores its original meaning as a group of individuals united by an age threshold.

By reappropriating and privatizing the experience of loss, Jaber formulates a critique of the postwar Lebanese novel as defined by Elias Khoury. The postwar novel is not alone the object of Jaber's criticism, but so is *Al-Mulhaq*, the cultural institution that constituted a platform for the expression of that discourse. Jaber's subversion of the narrative and critical discourse of his precursors neither undermines the status of the writer nor eliminates political engagement from the narrative text. On the contrary, by constructing an intertextual narrative based on numerous writing genres, Jaber redefines political engagement as the necessary return to the written text, the only source for knowledge and meaning. The narrator commemorates Ralph not by publishing eulogies in *Al-Mulhaq*, but by reverting to original texts drawn from pictures, articles, encyclopedias, police reports, and dictionaries that are either by or about Ralph. In other words, as he identifies the theoretical and political projections inherent in the newspaper eulogies, Jaber deploys the deceased intellectual's own words, which he had used to describe himself.

Jaber's subversion of the postwar Lebanese novel as well as his humanization of the intellectual also imagines a different readership. By alluding to Anglophone

and particularly children's literature, Jaber makes specific demands on his readers. Without a proper understanding of the original texts to which Jaber constantly refers, the readers of *Ralph Rizkallah* will be unable to engage the subtlety of the critique that he advances in his novel. Jaber's reinvention of the Lebanese postwar intellectual, novel, and reader signals the emergence of a Lebanese postmodern novel that does not eschew literary engagement, but redefines it by capitalizing on the literary text.

CHAPTER 5

MOURNING AS SPECTRAL HAUNTING IN SEBA AL-HERZ'S *THE OTHERS*

> This is exactly what the dead do: they mask themselves in their absences. They convert to a shadow that, concealed as is it, shows its reflection baldly in all the twists and turns our lives take.
>
> *The Others*, Seba al-Herz

The contemporary Arabic literary scene is exhibiting a growth in publications and readership paralleled by the introduction of new literary genres. A successful partnership between young Arab writers and unconventional publishers has not only redefined the Arabic literary scene, but it has also introduced marginal voices that experiment with language, themes, and narrative techniques. The proliferation of writings by young Arab novelists, bloggers, and poets has just begun to capture the attention of critics who have tackled these emerging literary genres from deconstructive theoretical models that position the texts within the context of globalization and the literary deployment of pastiche, intertexuality, and techno-writing (Al-Ghadeer 2006; Abdel-Messih 2009; El-Ariss 2010). Identifying these

young authors' writings as a contemporary act of 'hacking,' el-Ariss argues that "hacking functions as a literary subversion that empowers a new generation of writers to critique an Arab project of aesthetic and political modernity through a new language and media" (534).

The publication Rajaa Alsanea's (b. 1981) debut novel *Girls of Riyadh* in 2006 constituted an act of literary hacking and a turning point in contemporary Arabic and specifically Saudi Arabian literature. The novel's originality stems from the young author's witty depiction of four affluent young women within a context of globalized identities and changing social norms in Saudi Arabia. Alsanea portrays these conformist yet daring women in a literary language that draws heavily on colloquialism, techno-writing, and western cultural references. However, as the author employs an increasingly globalized language, she also negotiates a local and even folkloric cultural scene, and as Moneera al-Ghadeer notes, "Alsanea does not try to dispel the folklore around Arabian women but provokes the phantasm that ultimately intensifies the interest in gazing at *Girls of Riyadh*" (299). Indeed, the numerous controversies surrounding the novel, far from increasing its popularity in the Arab world, have accelerated its translation into several languages. This international commercial success transformed Alsanea into an overnight celebrity and brought attention to the literary contributions of other contemporary Arab and specifically Saudi women writers such as Zaynab Hifni (b. 1958), Laila al-Juhni (b.

1969), Seba al-Herz (b. 1985), and many others who have broken social and religious taboos in their writings.

Despite the thematic complexity and the stylistic diversity of their works, Saudi women writers have been either praised or denounced merely for subverting religious values and destabilizing prescribed gender roles. Arab literary critics have expressed views that range between dismissal of and outright condemnation of the young women writers due to the cursory nature of their topics and the paucity of their language. Critics have perceived the increase in the number of publications by Saudi women writers as a literary "phenomenon" [*ẓāhira*] driven by an "outburst" [*ṭafra*], a term associated not only with spontaneity and hastiness, but also with the transformative effect of oil on Gulf economies [*al-ṭafra al-nafṭiyya*]. This emerging trend is also considered a literary "eruption" [*fawra*] and "fashion" [*mūḍa*] in clear reference to tantrums and feminized consumption patterns.[1] In an article entitled "The Phenomenon of Saudi Women Writers," the Lebanese novelist Jabbour al-Douwayhi (b. 1949) writes:

> This small literary 'event' [*ḥadath*] limits itself to portraying a 'tame' feminine culture that indulges in commercial music, prayer rituals, horoscopes, and shallow critiques [*qirā'āt ṣaghīra*] […] It does not matter if we are standing before a promising literary phenomenon or a trend that seeks provocation (or both), these novels unveil a parallel 'underworld' that mocks prohibitions and widespread hypocrisy (9).

[1] A few illustrations of these reviews are "Ṭafrat al-riwāya al-nisā'iyya fi-l-saʿūdiyya" in *Al-Hayat* 11 Jan. 2011 and Douwayhi, Jabbour "Ẓāhirat al-Riwā'iyyā't al-saʿūdiyyāt" *Al-Nahar* 6 Jan. 2007: 9.

Al-Douwayhi's description of the works of these Saudi women writers as a 'small literary event' reveals a predominant dismissal among Arab critics, who interpret this literary phenomenon as an emotional outburst that does not succeed or even aspire to intervene politically.

However, this emerging literary trend fared well in the West. Marilyn Booth identifies a number of reasons for this enthusiastic reception in her article, "The Muslim Woman as Celebrity Author and the Politics of Translating Arabic" (2010) which probes the controversy surrounding her translation of *Girls of Riyadh*. Analyzing the ways in which the works of contemporary Arab women novelists are translated to European languages, Booth links the success of many Arab women writers to a growing interest among western audience to gaze into what is believed to be the hidden world of Arab and Muslim women. Booth argues that the increasing western interest in this new genre depends on "Orientalist ethnographicism" that she defines as

> a way of seeing and writing the Other that grounds authority in a written narrative of personal experience, "capturing" a society through the I/eye; and furthermore, claiming the authority of graphing the text in a global (and globalizing) language of reception, which is today predominantly English. (151)[2]

A similar perspective examines new Arab women writings beyond orientalist tropes. Acknowledging the revealing power of these texts, al-Ghadeer argues that

[2] Booth looks in particular at the ways in which her English translation of *Girls of Riyadh* was subsequently watered down in order to present to western readership a tame and familiar representation of the novel's main protagonists. Booth also shows how publishers pay attention to details such as dust jacket designs in order to market this literary genre to a western audience.

what appears as Arab "chick-lit" is in fact a much more complex and subtle literary genre that compels us to search for new theoretical frameworks in order to understand the depth of its political critique (2006).

Seba al-Herz published *The Others* (2006) amidst the aforementioned critical debate that assessed the validity of this emerging genre. Mindful of the controversial nature of her novel, the author of *The Others* chose to publish it under the pseudonym of Seba al-Herz. When *The Others* appeared in English in 2009, the publisher preserved the writer's pseudonym as well as the anonymity of the translator and identified Seba al-Herz as "the pseudonym of a twenty-six-year-old Saudi woman from al-Qatif in Saudi Arabia" (back cover). Writing anonymously or pseudonymously is common in Arabic and particularly Gulf women literature. Indeed, many Gulf women writers, such as Samira Khashuqji (1935-1986) and Sultana al-Sudayri (b. circa 1940), began their careers publishing under pseudonyms in order to avoid social stigma and religious conservatism in the early and mid 20th century. That the writer of *The Others* feels bound by the same constraints that prevented the preceding generations of women writers from publishing openly is revealing of the contemporary political and social environments that Seba al-Herz must navigate as a woman writer.

In *The Others,* a young college student narrates her life in the predominantly Shiʿi Saudi city of Qatif. The unidentified narrator struggles to reconcile her commitment to religious and political activism with the secrecy of her relationship

with a female lover. The narrator suffers from severe epileptic seizures that have rendered her dependent on medication and family support. The novel also makes shy allusions to the history of political violence that the Shiʿi community of Saudi Arabia has experienced and particularly to the political repression that the city of Qatif witnessed in the early 1980s. Despite the novel's covert political tone, critics primarily focus on the shocking portrayal of sex and homosexuality in Saudi Arabia. The Lebanese Abdo Wazen (b. 1957), for instance, argues that in *The Others,* Seba al-Herz aims to scandalize Saudi society in order to shake its inherent conservatism. He adds that *The Others* "penetrates the inner and hidden world of women and seeks to provoke something like a social scandal [*faḍīḥa ijtimāᶜiyya*]" (2006). Even the Saudi novelist Samar al-Muqrin (b. 1978) who authored the controversial *Women of Vice* (2008) understands *The Others* within a framework that draws exclusively on sexuality. In an interview discussing recent contributions in contemporary Saudi literature, al-Muqrin argues that al-Herz intended to demonstrate how heterosexual Saudi women are prone to homosexual behavior as a reaction to gender segregation and social oppression, without mentioning the novel's political nuances (Al-Alawi 2010).

Upon its translation into English, *The Others* became a sensation in American popular media. A reviewer in *New York Magazine* writes: "This Saudi novel, in which a closeted lesbian Shiʿi girl feverishly narrates her struggles and affairs, offers a rare personal glimpse into the repressive Kingdom" (2009). Equally interested in the

secret world of the Saudi harem, another reviewer adds that the novel is "A trance-like excursion into contemporary Saudi Arabian life […] The novel takes the mixing of ancient and modern cultures in the Muslim world and spotlights the contrast between the two" (Seggel 2010). Such critical responses reduce the novel either to a statement against the implications of social repression in Saudi Arabic or to an Orientalist ethnography of sex and homosexuality.[3]

Although Seba al-Herz's *The Others*—like many other contemporary Saudi novels—exposes the rigidity of religious and patriarchal structures, it is important to question, challenge, and present alternatives to such interpretations. Building on the critiques of both al-Ghadeer and Booth, I suggest in this chapter a different reading of *The Others* in order to show how the novel offers indeed a profound critique of political violence in Saudi Arabia and an alternative representation of mourning. As I explore the political undertones of *The Others*, which pertain to political violence and mourning in the Shiʿi community of Qatif, I examine the ways in which the collective experience of violence and loss that the community experienced resurfaces as an unconscious and destructive energy that haunts the narrator. I investigate al-Herz's writing techniques and position the narrative within a religious Shiʿi framework that defines the narrator's personal sense of loss. In my analysis of the narrator's battle with epilepsy, I argue that a transgenerational

[3] The English version of the novel reiterates that Orientalist representation. Designed by the Iranian artist Shirin Neshat (b.1957), the cover art features a photograph of two henna-tattooed hands holding each other.

heritage of violence and loss triggers her recurring mental collapses. Drawing on Nicolas Abraham and Jacques Derrida's understanding of mourning and transgenerational haunting, I show how the legacy of communal oppression and personal grief, mutates into transgenerational specters that the narrator embodies.

Furthermore, in my reading of *The Others,* I contend that al-Herz's depiction of mourning as spectral haunting presents an alternative interpretation of political commitment in contemporary Arabic literature. As she confronts the specter of her deceased brother Hassan, the narrator inadvertently draws a different portrait of the young Arab intellectual. Hassan's religious and sectarian identifications constitute a departure from the secular and Arab nationalist political culture of the previous generation of Arab intellectuals. The narrator's distinctive portrayal of the contemporary Arab intellectual defines not only political commitment, but also an alternative poetics of mourning the Arab intellectual.

Memories of Qatif

In one of her interviews, Seba al-Herz states: "*The Others* is the narrative of severed, incomplete, unbalanced, sick, and troubled relationships" (2007).[4] Narrated in the first personal singular, or what Booth refers to as "the narrative I/eye," *The Others* depicts one young woman's troubled memories and relationships within the city of Qatif. In a sober and lyrical tone, the anonymous narrator

[4] The original Arabic reads: "Al-ākharūn sard li-ᶜalāqāt mabtūra wa nāqiṣa wa mukhtalla wa marīḍa wa ma'zūma."

describes her marginal position as a Shiʿi in a predominantly Sunni environment; as a woman in a gender-segregated society; and as an epileptic suffering from frequent seizures. In a narrative tone that resembles diary entries, the narrator begins describing her tumultuous relationship with a female lover named Dai, and delves into a chronicle of her queer sexual encounters within the gender-segregated community of Qatif. Born into a religious and conservative family, the narrator's mobility is restricted to her women's college, the Shiʿi community center [*ḥusayniyya*] of Qatif, and the homes of her female lovers and friends. The narrator's limited mobility bounds her exclusively to Qatif's feminized spaces, which inadvertently sanction her queer sexual experimentations.

The narrator's social and physical mobility are further compromised by frequent epileptic seizures. She likens her seizures to violent attacks and invasions that induce her into a state of unconsciousness and fantasy, in which she is haunted by those who have departed from her life. During almost all of her seizures, the narrator sees the specter of her older brother, Hassan, who succumbed to leukemia while she was still young. Before his premature death, Hassan was a deeply religious intellectual and political activist in his community. As a young Shiʿi intellectual resisting Saudi political subjugation, Hassan defined his political sensibilities outside the dominant Arab nationalist and secular paradigms that had hitherto driven his preceding generation of Arab intellectuals. An admirer of Imam Baqir al-Sadr (1935-1980), an Iraqi intellectual who was a revered religious figure, Hassan

tapped into his historical and religious Shiʿi heritage and promoted a sectarian identity structure that transcended the dominant Arab intellectual discourse. Hassan appears in the narrator's fantasy as an idealized figure that has shaped her political identity and inspired her volunteer work. In her leisure time, the narrator volunteers in her community's *ḥusayniyya.* Originally a space for conducting religious ceremonies, the *ḥusayniyya* in the Saudi Arabian Eastern province has acquired a political significance, particularly following years of state repression. At the *ḥusayniyya,* the narrator prepares intensive summer courses in Islamic jurisprudence, volunteers in community activities, and writes for a pedagogic magazine dedicated to raising cultural awareness among community youth (38).

As a young woman growing up in Qatif, the narrator expresses her alienation from her parents' generation. The narrator's predecessors consumed Egyptian pop films and music, read Arab authors such as Neguib Mahfouz (1911-2006) and Yusuf Idriss (1927-1991), and were affected by the historical events of the *naksa,* the 1973 War, and the subsequent Camp David peace treaty between Israel and Egypt in 1979. Despite her awareness of the significance of these events to her parents' generation, the narrator is nevertheless unable to claim them. Decrying their position, she criticizes her parents' generation and they ways they have "gone right into their elder roles, playing paternalistic games with my generation, confronting me from a position of studied superiority" (85-86). The narrator blames her elders for silencing significant historical events and concealing truth in order to protect the

youth from being victimized by the same violent political structures. For the disillusioned narrator, even her political essays in the community's magazine are no longer a valid means for uncovering that truth. She confesses:

> As a matter of fact, this writing that I was doing was really not *writing*. The style was basically a matter of forcing your writing skills into a format that was both simple and truly difficult at the same time, something I would label "popular writing." Writing that everyone would get. The most important thing was to harness your mind to a particular and well-defined set of possible and acceptable ideas. […] How do the intellectuals and the wordsmiths put it? *Ideology*?[5] Ideological writing? That might be it. (118)

In contrast to the dominant ideology of her predecessors, the disenchanted narrator defines her identity as a young political activist in Qatif. Distancing herself from redundant ideological constructs, she draws on western cultural references, such as popular television series, films, and music, and deploys technological jargon borrowed from chat rooms and emails. Despite her exclusion from mainstream Saudi culture, the narrator's generation identifies with a global culture that challenges local preset sectarian and nationalist identities. As she distances herself from traditional epistemological models, the narrator resorts to technology and particularly to the web in search for her community's repressed memories. In other words, she resorts to a global tool in order to search for and salvage local historical narratives.

The men in the narrator's life appear transient or absent. The reader vaguely learns of the detention of her father and his subsequent death following the political

[5] In the original Arabic text, the term "ideology" is transliterated from English.

upheavals in Qatif in the early 1980s. The reader also witnesses the narrator's continuous mourning of her brother Hassan in interrupted vignettes that maintain the novels' somber tone. The narrator's older brother, Muhammad, moves out of his family home following his marriage, and her younger brother, Faysal, leaves Qatif in order to pursue his studies. Not only are the narrator's male kin transient or absent, but the other characters with whom she engages emotionally are similarly fleeting.

The transience of the narrator's personal relationships ultimately underscores the significance of time in the novel. Time in *The Others* is truncated as the reader navigates within interrupted and anachronistic time markers. The narrative events are on the one hand organized by the tempo of the five daily prayers that the pious narrator performs, and on the other, by her frequent epileptic seizures, which punctuate the novel's main narrative events. *The Others* reveals the significance of two dates in the Islamic calendar: the ninth of Muharram and Muharram1400 AH. The first month of the Islamic year, Muharram is central to Shiʿi religious traditions. During the sacred month of Muharram, Shiʿi communities across the Islamic world perform lamentation rituals in remembrance of Hussein, Prophet Muhammad's grandson who was killed in battle in the Iraqi city of Karbala in 61 AH /680 CE. Outnumbered and besieged by soldiers loyal to the caliph Yazid bin Muawiya, Hussein was killed during *ʿāshūrā'* or the tenth day of the month of Muharram. The tenth day of Muharram in Shiʿi tradition thus represents martyrdom and humiliation at the hands of Sunni tyranny.

Muharram commemoration rituals have taken different forms in the Muslim world. However, it has retained the lamentation ritual that goes back as far as 10th century Baghdad when Zaynab, the sister of Hussein, held the first lamentation gathering [*majlis ʿazā'*]. In traditional Shiʿi thought, the yearly lamentation gatherings and the weeping for the martyrs of Karbala represent a cathartic ritual that has become a marker of a distinctive Shiʿi identity in a predominantly Sunni Muslim world (Pinault 488-489).[6] On the ninth day of Muḥarram, the eve of the yearly commemoration of the martyrdom of Hussein, the narrator experiences her first climax with her female lover Dai. That event, which seems to be an intimate and private moment, thereby assumes a political significance, announcing to the reader that the boundary between the personal and the political, sex and sect, is unstable in *The Others*.

Muharram1400, the other significant time marker in the narrative, is similarly crucial to the history of Qatif and to the Shiʿi community of the Arabian Gulf in general. In their long history of confrontation with Ottoman rule, Qatif's Shiʿis have witnessed numerous waves of persecution by rulers wary of their growing presence and influence in the city. The Shiʿis' tenuous relationship with state authority persisted under the Wahhabi Saudi regime. In 1930, the Shiʿis of

[6] For studies about the enactment of lamentation rituals, see Deeb, Lara. "Living Ashura in Lebanon: Mourning Transformed to Sacrifice." *Comparative Studies of South Asia Africa and the Middle East* 25.1 (2005): 122-137. Web. 10 June 2011 and Hussain, Ali J. "The Mourning of History and the History of Mourning: The Evolution of Ritual Commemoration of the Battle of Karbala." *Comparative Studies of South Asia Africa and the Middle East* 25.1 (2005): 78-88. Web. 10 June 2011.

Saudi Arabia, specifically those of Qatif, acquired nominal autonomy in religious practices but remained subject to strict regulatory measures that curtailed the establishment of Shiʿi religious centers and the propagation of religious literature (Louer 19-20, 161). The advent of the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979 radically influenced the Saudi Shiʿi community, whose tension with the Saudi regime escalated into a full-fledged uprising known as *Intifāḍat Muharram1400*. The *Intifāḍa* of the Islamic month of Muharram of the year 1400 of the Islamic calendar (the equivalent of November 1979 in the Gregorian calendar) constituted a turning point in the already contentious relationship with the Saudi state.

Drawing on Shiʿi religious and political motifs of martyrdom and historical oppression, the revolt was able to spread rapidly and attract young men mobilized by a traditional religious Shiʿi education. The uprising led to a confrontation with Saudi military forces that used live ammunition to quell the protests. The violent state suppression of the *Intifāḍa* led to a quasi quarantine of Qatif. The state sealed all the roads leading to the city, cut phone lines, and prevented news of the uprising from reaching local and international media (Trofimov 186). The inhabitants of Qatif also endured the detention, torture, and disappearance of hundreds of young men who participated in the uprising. To this day, some of the protesters remain missing and details of the events continue to be obscured by the Saudi regime.

The uprising has occupied, however, a particular position within the Saudi Shiʿi collective memory, around which the narrative of *The Others* is constructed.

Although the novel presents only vague and disjointed references to this event, it nevertheless reveals the event's impact on the Shiʿi community of Qatif. In the novel, the narrator searches online for answers about the details of the *Intifāḍa* to no avail. Unable to quell her unrequited questions, the narrator becomes consumed by the repressed memories of the *Intifāḍa* in a political context where commemoration and remembrance are prohibited. In this context, those individuals who have vanished prematurely and whose memory remains repressed such as the narrator's brother Hassan or the martyrs of *Intifāḍat Muḥarram*, resurface through specters that shatter the narrator's frail body.

The Specters of Qatif

The theoretical contributions in psychoanalysis, particularly those of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok serve to frame the narrator's physical pains and recurrent epileptic seizures. Abraham and Torok argue that the covert secrets, pains, and traumas of past generations constitute a spectral figure, a phantom, that returns to disturb the lives of descendants oblivious to their past. For Abraham, the phantom is a formation of the unconscious that is transmitted from the parent's unconscious into that of the child ("Notes on the Phantom" 290). This formation within the unconscious constitutes a moment of aporia, a gap, or what Abraham calls "the unspeakable" (Idem.). These phantomatic manifestations, in Abraham's terms, "rule an entire family's history and function as the token of its pitiable

articulations" (292). Phantoms, in this sense, are not the spirits of the dead but the unspoken "lacunae left in us by the secrets of the others" (Abraham and Torok 427).

Abraham points to the uncanny resemblance between the phantoms of past generations and Freud's description of the death instinct on three significant levels. First, Abraham holds that the phantom in question has no self-derived energy and cannot be analytically separated and examined. As a dependent and almost parasitical entity, the phantom only reveals itself through its destructive traces. Second, similar to the death instinct, the disruptive features of the phantom are evident as it "pursues in silence its work of disarray" and "wrecks havoc, from within the unconscious, in the coherence of logical progression." Third, and perhaps most crucial, the phantom reappears endlessly and escapes rationalization just as the death instinct it resembles ("Notes on the Phantom" 292). Thus, in their understanding of spectral haunting, Abraham and Torok define the phantom as an abstract energy driven by the unspeakable secrets of past generations. Shaped by the horrors and traumas of the past, the unspeakable secrets reproduce themselves in the unconscious of descents whose consciousness is forever transformed.

In *Specters of Marx* (1993), Derrida engages the themes of death, mourning, and haunting, coining the concept of hauntology [*hantologie*], which complements Abraham and Torok's psychoanalytic conceptualization of the phantom. He argues that the memory of generations past, or transgenerational memory, embodies a set of long-lasting schemes of thought and action that determine behavior, which is

neither voluntary nor involuntary. The memories, traumas, and voices of one generation, according to Derrida, mark their presence in the unconscious of the other. In agreement with Abraham and Torok, Derrida states that transgenerational memory is a form of memory, most often constituted of hidden and reprehensible secrets that hover in the space between social and psychic history. These memories, Derrida states, "make it impossible for the one who unconsciously carries them to make the link" (*Specters of Marx* 5). Transgenerational memory, which the disappeared bequeath to the living, is a dynamic inheritance that takes a life of its own in the memory of survivors. Similar to the Freudian death instinct, transgenerational memory is productive, says Derrida: "Whether it transforms or transforms itself, poses or decomposes itself: the spirit, 'the spirit of the spirit' is *work.* A certain *power of transformation…the spirit…work"* (Author's emphasis, 9). Generational memory has all the characteristics of a specter that comes back, a "*revenant."* The specter that haunts via its non-presence embodies, thus, an absent or departed one who no longer belongs to the realm of knowledge and affect. In Derrida's own playful words, the specter "looks at us/concerns us [*nous regarde*] without being seen" (7). Similar to the popular ghost, transgenerational memory functions within spatial etymologies.

Just as the popular phantom haunts a place such as cemetery, an old house, or a castle, the transgenerational phantom inhabits the psyche and defines its identity. Indeed, the shadow of spectral haunting conceives and sustains the self. For

Derrida's, "Only through [the] experience of the other, and of the other as other who can die, leaving in me or in us the memory of the other, does the "me" or the "us" arise" (Derrida, *Memoires de Paul de Man* 33). This understanding of a productive and formative spectrality, illustrated in the works of Abraham, Torok, and Derrida, frames my reading of *The Others.* This theoretical framework advances an interpretation of the specter as the embodiment of the unspeakable secrets of past generations that mark the psyche of the haunted descendants. The heritage of communal oppression and personal grief that the narrator carries, I argue, mutates into transgenerational haunting, which possesses her body.

Transgenerational memory haunts the narrator's shattered psyche as well as her tormented and collapsing body. Early on in her fragmented narrative, the narrator reflects on the complexity of her "heritage" [*irth*],[7] which pertains to her both as an individual and a member of a persecuted community. Although she was born after *Intifāḍat Muharram1400,* the narrator still identifies with her community, and understands the implications of her community's losses and unachieved work of mourning. Commenting on the difficulty of inheriting this legacy she states:

> Weeping is not one of my distinguishing features. But it is true as well that I have inherited a superabundance of weeping that goes back to an ancient era. Ever since [the Battle of] Karbala, ever since the death of that young man so long ago, we Shiʿi s have been weeping, and our tears never have dried up. And since Karbala, we have come to understand our weeping as an ongoing, never-ending daily act, a deed that is always there. […] And so, I do hold

[7] The Arabic term means both heritage (cultural and historical) and inheritance (personal and material). The fusion of both meanings is a revealing statement about the enmeshment of the personal and the political in *The Others*.

> inside of me a profuse reservoir, tears that exhaust me every night, but I do not cry. (65)

Linking her personal heritage of mourning to her community's early experience of loss, the narrator fuses the singular "I" with the plural "we" and thereby eliminates the boundaries between the individual and the collective, the personal and the political. The narrator gives the reader the choice of interpreting the first person plural as either the Shiʿis of Qatif or the bereaved women of Karbala, thereby drawing a historical connection between the narrator and her Shiʿi ancestors. As it transcends time and space, the narrator's heritage returns to her in the form of specters that haunt and possess her body. The returning specter secretly haunts the narrator, who is tormented by the paradox of having a "profuse reservoir of tears" on one hand and an inability to cry, on the other. Thus, the collective experience of trauma materializes in the narrator's tears.

Whereas the narrator experiences collective trauma intimately, she historicizes her personal loss and connects it to the losses that the collectivity has endured. Throughout the novel, the narrator laments the loss of her older and idealized brother Hassan who lost his battle with leukemia. She likens her brother's blood disease to poisoning, the same affliction that killed the Prophet's grandson Hassan who was also the brother of Hussein. The narrator describes the loss of Hassan in a register that is evocative of both emotional and bodily pain:

> Hassan's leaving is the very peak of what I am capable of enduring. It is the high ceiling of pain beneath which all else is indifferent. His leaving is pain, bereavement, the ache of missing someone, rejection, emotional breakdown,

> the fissuring of the soul, the body's deterioration and collapse, the reign of absence that you cannot shake, the curse of fear, the savagery of the death endured by the bereaved who is sadly left behind. Death makes everything else an everyday mundane triviality, and makes me look at life with disdain. (88)

The narrator is equivocal about the object of her mourning, which could be either the historical figure or her late brother. By blurring the distinction between the two identities, the narrator historicizes and politicizes her loss and attributes to it collective significance. The narrator experiences the death of Hassan as the epitome of spiritual torment and bodily pain that provoke an array of affective reactions such as fear, grief, isolation, and spiritual collapse. The narrator portrays the unspeakable loss of Hassan as a specter that haunts a space that is neither earthly nor heavenly, but rather a fantasmatic place between sanity and sickness, sobriety and stupor, mourning and denial. In one of the narrator's many fantasies, Hassan appears as a spectral and angelic figure that makes her "spread her wings in the sunshine" (40). Elevating her over her bodily torments, Hassan flies with her "like a seagull that never ceased to embrace the skies" (Idem.).

The narrator's lamentation of her brother reveals the depth and significance of their relationship, and sheds light on another kind of heritage that she negotiates. The reader gradually learns that Hassan played a decisive role in shaping his young sister's intellectual identity and political allegiance by encouraging her to read. She remembers:

> So long ago, back in the days when, standing on tiptoe, I could not even make myself come up to his shoulders, I took from his bookshelves a book called

> *Our Philosophy* by the martyr al-Sadr. It had a blue leatherette cover and the fact that it was cool to the touch even at the height of the summer was what made my fingers pull it off the shelf and take it from his library. He did not say that I would not understand it, that perhaps I would need two more years or even three, plus ten additional centimeters, that there were other books there more appropriate to my small brain. He smiled slightly and said: "Tomorrow I want you to come and discuss what you read, do you understand?" (84)

At an early age, the narrator had access to the library of her brother who encouraged her to read one of the most significant political treatises for the Shiʿi community, particularly in the Gulf region. *Our Philosophy* [*falsafatunā*] (1968; Eng. 1989) is a collection of philosophical essays by Imam Baqir al-Sadr (1935-1980), an Iraqi Twelver Shiʿi cleric and the ideological founder of the Islamic Daawa Party in Iraq. Al-Sadr is a direct descendent of the Prophet through the seventh Shiʿi Imam, Musa al-Qazim, and is one of the early and most influential political ideologues of Shiʿi Islam. Due to al-Sadr's growing influence within Shiʿi communities of Iraq and the Arabian Gulf, Saddam Hussein (1937-2006) executed him along with his sister and companion in struggle, Amina al-Sadr (1938-1980), also known as *Bint al-Hudā*.[8] An influential political and feminist activist in the conservative Shiʿi city of Najaf, Amina al-Sadr organized mass rallies against Saddam Hussein's persecution of her brother before their arrest and execution. At an early age, the narrator's political identity drew on the collective significance of the execution of Baqir and

[8] See Joyce Wiley's "'Alima Bint al-Huda: Women's Advocate" for an analysis of Amina al-Sadr as a religious Shiʿi authority (*marjaʿiyya*) in Walbridge, Linda S. *The Most Learned of the Shi`a: The Institution of the Marja` Taqlid*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2001: 149-160. Print.

Amina al-Sadr, and it is through the experience of their violent deaths that the narrator's political subjectivity emerges.

However, the narrator's seemingly arbitrary choice of books is revealing. Her random choice establishes a direct genealogy between the modern political identity upon which she consciously reflects and the unconscious heritage that she channels. While reading *Our Philosophy,* the narrator summons the spirit of Amina al-Sadr, who like the narrator, shared close connections with her older brother. This transgenerational identification transcends both Amina al-Sadr and the narrator. Indeed, the pain from which Amina al-Sadr suffered during the persecution of her brother evokes that which Zaynab, the Prophet's granddaughter, endured after the premature and wrongful death of her brothers Hassan and Hussein. Indeed, the narrator inadvertently carries the same transgenerational heritage of mourning and torments as her ancestors, Zaynab and Amina, grieving sisters of their persecuted and martyred brothers.

The unspeakable secrets of violence and persecution that tormented the narrator's ancestor Zaynab resurface in her unconscious attraction to *Our Philosophy* in general, and to Amina's history of suffering in particular. Although the specters of Zaynab and Amina occupy the narrator's unconscious, they nevertheless leave palpable traces, which, in Abraham's words, "escape rationalization" ("Notes on the Phantom" 292). Unable to identify or verbalize the nature of this unconscious legacy, the narrator expresses her anxiety: "I am afraid of those who have granted

me a meaning and a history. I am afraid because they grant me something that stays with me after they have departed" (207). The narrator's transgenerational heritage of violence, which ties her to a historical community through the figures of Zaynab and Amina, resurfaces in the form of specters that simultaneously haunt her memory and body.

Bodily Abjections

The scarcity of time markers destabilizes the truncated narrative of *The Others*. Only material sites, whether the cities of Qatif and Karbala or the frail body of the narrator, function as reliable narrative spaces. The narrator is aware of the importance of tying her identity to a significant space. Reacting to the space-negating nature of the virtual world, the narrator asks her virtual lover, Rayyan, to change his chat room name to *A Safe Place For Love* and adds: "We are all places" (234). The narrator's belief in the spatialization of her subjectivity reiterates one of the determining characteristics of spectral haunting. Haunting needs to occupy a space: it must take place both literally and figuratively. In the case of *The Others*, the body of the narrator represents the receptacle of transgenerational haunting. The specters of past generations, which the narrator defines as "the others" [*al-ākharūn*] occupy her body:

> Other people become corpses that loiter within me and turn to rot. These others refuse to go away. These others refuse to leave me in peace. […] The nights are unbearable here—the screaming, the scratching and wrangling, the massing and piling of bodies. They redraw the borders of each one's dominion over the territories of my body. I would have preferred dust and

> cobwebs to rats chewing relentlessly at my heart, leaving splinters of wood behind. Splinters everywhere inside of me. (7)

"Other people," or the specters that inhabit her body, resurface as zombies who fight to mark the boundaries of the space they occupy within her. The violent imagery deepens as specters turn into rats that slowly chew on her heart and violently compete over the space of her body. The struggle and competition that the narrator describes pertain to the different memories of loss and persecution that she and her community have suffered starting with the Battle of Karbala to the recent events of *Intifāḍat Muḥarram,* and ending with the death of her brother Hassan. The "splinters of wood" that the departed leave behind are precisely the transgenerational heritage that the narrator relives through her seizures.

The narrator begins experiencing her first epileptic seizures at the age of eleven, right after Hassan's death. The repressed memory of her brother's death is projected into her illness, which has in turn become an unspeakable secret that lies outside discourse. The narrator believes that her disease:

> has always been a secret. For long periods of time, even speaking about it was a disgraceful act that could trigger a scolding in our household. It was as if the illness was a sin without possibility of forgiveness, a flaw it was necessary to hide, a little scandal blemishing the family that must not get out beyond the most intimate circles. (110)

The unspeakable secrets of her Shiʿi ancestors and her brother Hassan have returned to haunt the narrator through epileptic seizures. The narrator politicizes and sexualizes her disease when she declares, "the convulsions of my body strip me naked" (261). The terms she uses to describe the devastation of her disease in the

original Arabic [*intifāḍāt jasadī*] recall *Intifāḍat Muharram1400*. The narrator's feeling of humiliation following each epileptic seizure evokes *Intifāḍat Muharram1400*, which equally weakened and denuded the Shiʿi community of Qatif at the hand of the Saudi Sunni rule. Therefore, the violence inherent in the narrator's epileptic seizures is a reproduction of the violence of the numerous losses that she has endured both as an individual and as a member of a collectivity.

Describing her humiliation during one of her seizures in the presence of her female colleagues, the narrator remembers:

> My entire face was like a burst of gunfire floating on a dark and empty expanse. The faces of those women were like reverberations from a game of roulette than began as a joke and ended in a wall of blood. I saw many faces lowering their gazes toward me, most frightened, others haunted by worry. Even when it is not contagious, illness strikes fear in people's hearts, for it offers observers a live show of what could easily happen to them under similar circumstances. Illness exhibits to all watches just how fragile our humanity is. Even so, I do not doubt even one part in one hundred that the effect of illness to witnesses to it is nothing compared to the reality of how illness disfigures a human body, gashing open the soul and mind of the invalid. (105)

The narrator feels her humiliation in the gaze of her colleagues who have rushed to help her. In their eyes, she reads the horror of the fear and the anxiety that her collapse has induced. The narrator's sudden seizure transforms her into a creature that causes terror, pity, and disgust and that reminds the fearful witnesses of their own demise. The narrator represents the violence of her seizures in terms that evoke anxiety and aversion, or what Julia Kristeva identifies as "the abject."

Kristeva argues that the abject is the human reaction of fear and disgust caused by the sight, touch, taste, or smell of previously living organisms such as a corpse or even organic discharges such as blood, urine, or excrement. The abject for Kristeva is when the system of meaning or the codified signification of the world surrounding us collapses and blurs the distinction between the subject and the object, self and other. The abject, the author argues, is "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules"(4). Furthermore, abjection for Kristeva is not caused by the subject's exploration of the meaning of death, but instead by the subject's transformation into a witness of his/her own death or decay:

> A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. (3)

The corpse and bodily discharges exemplify the experience of the abject because they force the subject to confront her demise. Following each of her epileptic seizures, the narrator faces the abjection of her body as it begins discharging dreadful liquids such as urine, saliva, and tears:

> What embarrassed me was the saliva flowing out the sides of my lips and rushing downward toward the collar of my blouse. I wiped my mouth in disgust while my other hand covered my forehead to shade my lowered face, so that the few tears welling from my eyes would not be visible, nor my shortened breaths obvious. (105-106)

As she sees, touches, tastes, and smells her body's abject discharge, the narrator witnesses her own mortality and becomes an inhabitant of a liminal space between the world of the living and the world of the dead.

Expanding on her understanding of the abject, Kristeva argues that the abject can also extend to traumatic events in history such as the concentration camp or, in the narrator's case, *Intifāḍat Muḥarram.* The traumatic experience of extreme collective violence call attention to what Kristeva calls the "fragility of the law" or the vulnerability of the symbolic structure or ethical system through which we understand our world. The link between the abjection of the narrator's body and that of the history of Qatif is clear in the narrator's description of her illness. The narrator intensifies the affective description of her seizures when she remembers how her "mouth smelled disgusting, an odor something like a chemical of unknown composition or a medicine bottle filled with rotting capsules too unbearably noxious to swallow" (106). The destructive character of the seizure as well as the rotten capsules invites the reader to witness the ravaging powers of the specters that haunt the narrator. The violence of the seizure as well as the repulsive chemicals she is compelled to swallow evoke the chemicals that the Saudi army used to suppress the Qatif uprising in 1979. Here, we once again witness the destructive and somatic powers of the many specters that haunt the frail narrator.

Seba al-Herz's *The Others* reveals how the unspeakable acts of violence that each generation bequeaths to the next leave somatic traces and transform the body

as well as the memory of the living. The repressed violence of the Battle of Karbala, the execution of Baqir and Amina al-Sadr, and the traumatic events of *Intifāḍat Muharram*of 1979 have all resurfaced as specters that haunt the sickly narrator. As she unconsciously identifies with Zaynab, the sister of the first Shiʿi martyrs, and Amina, the sister of Baqir al-Sadr, her body becomes a site of struggle for competing transgenerational memories. Memories of thirteen centuries of violence and pain mark their presence through epileptic seizures that throw her into episodes of physical and mental breakdown. Spectral haunting is therefore that which occurs after physical violence has ceased and the forced erasure of memory has begun. The seizures thereby expose the abjection of past violence and the predicament of the Shiʿi community that is unable to mourn its losses.

As she struggles against political violence, illness, and erasure, the narrator in *The Others* occupies a marginal subject position within contemporary Arab societies. This position is remarkably different from that of protagonists in the works of the previous generations of writers who were the cultural vanguard of their societies and have embodied their societies' nationalist projects and moral values. Furthermore, the writer sustains her rebellion by preserving her anonymity and thereby renouncing the intellectual heritage that her predecessors have bequeathed to her. Despite this gradual shift, *The Others* still demonstrates al-Herz's interest in exploring the intertwinement of loss and mourning in an innovative

framework that understands collective trauma not in discourse but in its traces on the subconscious.

In *The Others,* Seba al-Herz therefore questions the conventional rhetoric of mourning that has marked the works of previous generations of Arab writers. Even though al-Herz retains the theme of loss, she nevertheless transforms and appropriates it beyond the traditional masternarrative of mourning. Al-Herz appears to depart from the preceding generations' overarching ideological discourse about the Arab intellectual's postcolonial condition, the tradition/modernity nexus, and the Arab-Israeli conflict, all of which had advanced a specific approach to mourning. As she promotes a sectarian and transnational Shiʿi identity, the author questions Arab nationalisms as organizing paradigms. Furthermore, the narrator in *The Other* promotes an alternative representation of the Arab intellectual that challenges the previous representations of the Arab nationalist, secular, and exilic intellectual. Politically and socially rooted in his Shiʿi community, the contemporary intellectual in al-Herz's novel no longer recognizes exile as a defining feature of his identity. Venerating ancestors whose works reflected a commitment to both jurisprudence and political activism, the contemporary intellectual transcends the secular nationalist profile of the political committed Arab intellectual and searches for legitimacy at the intersection of metaphysics and political pragmatism.

CONCLUSION

The different texts that I have explored revealed a transformation in the representation of the death of the Arab intellectual. I have shown how in their melancholic narratives, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Mahmoud Darwish, Mohammad al-Maghout, and Samih al-Qasem, not only mourned their peers but also themselves as members of a generation of intellectuals who have been defeated politically and ideologically. In his essays, memoirs, and novels, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, for instance, linked Palestinian intellectuals to two interrelated generations. In the wake of the 1948 *nakba,* a first generation of "wanderers," included thousands of Palestinians who defined themselves not as refugees, but rather as mobile intellectuals working in cultural and educational institutions across the Arab world. When Palestinian intellectuals, like Jabra, settled in Baghdad in the 1950s, they identified with another generation of Iraqi intellectuals whom Abdel Rahman Munif would later call the generation of "dreamers" [*ḥālimūn*]. This Iraqi generation included prominent intellectuals from the Iraqi cultural vanguard who promoted modernist trends in art and literature. As "wanderers" and "dreamers," both generations of intellectuals isolated their artistic and literary projects from political struggle. Following the 1967 war and the radicalization of the dominant Arab political discourse, many Arab intellectuals reconceived themselves as politically committed writers and their works as literary sites for the expression of political causes. An illustration of that transformation is Jabra's *In Search of Walid Masoud*, which captured the historical

juncture that ultimately exposed and discredited the discourse of a generation of politically withdrawn intellectuals.

Defeated by the emasculating effects of exile and the inefficacy of the modernist intellectual discourse in the process of liberating Palestine, the title-character Walid Masoud vanished from Baghdad in the early 1970s. As Walid's friends mourned his loss, they lamented the collapse of the modernist discourse that he had incorporated into his writings. Additionally, as Walid's friends mourned him, they also mourned themselves as members of a generation of Arab, and in particular, Iraqi intellectuals, who failed to lead their people in their struggle for modernization and national liberation. Following his disappearance from Baghdad, the Palestinian intellectual Walid Masoud reemerged as a *fidā'ī* or a counter-intellectual figure. Set to salvage his nation from the collapse of the word-centered discourse of intellectuals, the *fidā'ī* embodied a superior masculinity that located heroism not in critical interventions but in physical and military action.

The following generation of intellectuals such as Mahmoud Darwish, Samih al-Qasem, and Mohammad al-Maghout, who identified with the "sixties generation" [*jīl al-sittīnāt*] and were mobilized by the 1967 war, emphasized in contrast political commitment in their works. Promoting a radical position regarding the liberation of Palestine, these intellectuals suffered from the political setbacks that the 1967 defeat engendered. Beset by political persecution, military defeat, and exile, this generation of intellectuals experienced loss not only on an intellectual level but also

on a personal and existential level. The collective experience of loss that Darwish, al-Maghout, and al-Qasem expressed in elegies to their friends have generated an elegiac discourse that challenges the boundaries between mourning and melancholia. As they identified with their friends, the poets also lamented themselves as members of an embattled generation of Arab intellectuals. The melancholic affect inherent in these elegies appeared in these authors' identification with and internalization of their losses, a perceived act of fidelity that subsequently ended in a self-destructive death wish.

These generations of writers, who lamented in their works the demise of ideological paradigms and the defeat of the Arab intellectual, have bequeathed to young contemporary writers an elegiac discourse that attributes to the Arab intellectual the power of salvation while lamenting his defeat. Contemporary writers, however, increasingly convey in their works a different understanding of both the intellectual and political commitment. For these authors, literature has ceased to be a mere reflection of an overarching political discourse about nationalism, socialism, and militancy. As they redefine the role of the intellectual, young authors experiment with new literary forms and narrative techniques that express new aesthetic, social, and political realities.

In my analysis of Rabih Jaber's *Ralph Rizkallah through the Looking Glass* and Seba al-Herz's *The Others,* I explored problems associated with critical reception and classification that the writers have encountered. Whereas *The Others* was critically

dismissed as just another contribution to pulp Saudi literature, *Ralph Rizkallah* was interpreted as an extension of Elias Khoury's project about postwar Lebanese collective memory. The critical corpus pertaining to both novels has left unanswered questions relating to the ways in which these authors stage questions of loss at the intersection of the personal and the political, the family and the state.

In addition to engaging questions of reception and classification, I have traced a transformation in the representation of the Arab intellectual in the works of Jaber and al-Herz. The different intellectuals that emerged in al-Herz's *The Others* and Rabih Jaber's *Ralph Rizkallah* indicates the complexity of the representation of the intellectual in the works of a young generation of writers. Although the two writers drew fundamentally different portraits of the contemporary Arab intellectual, they nevertheless shared a similar interest in destabilizing and redefining the political categories that the previous generations of Arab writers had bequeathed to them.

In my analysis of *Ralph Rizkallah,* I have shown how political commitment has taken a different form in Lebanese postwar literature. Authors such as Elias Khoury conceived of the politically committed writer as an intellectual who is able to preserve and safeguard the collective memory of an entire nation by pointing out to the repressed war memories and historical identity of Beirut, the devastated capital. Khoury's "generation of ruins" [*jīl al-kharāb*], codified the public intellectual as the embodiment of the collective struggle against oblivion. The suicide of the

Lebanese psychologist and journalist Ralph Rizkallah was therefore interpreted as an act of political protest against the erasure of the collective memory pertaining to the Lebanese civil war.

In that context, Rabih Jaber advanced in *Ralph Rizkallah* an interpretation of the postwar Lebanese intellectual outside the trope of political commitment as it had been defined by the previous generations of intellectuals. De-politicized and de-historicized, Ralph Rizkallah's generation, according to Jaber, no longer included politically motivated intellectuals but instead a group of individuals united simply by an age threshold and a collective fixation on sickness and ageing. Jaber portrayed the postwar Lebanese intellectual as a lone and sickly figure who lives in complete social and intellectual isolation. In the absence of interlocutors, the intellectual disengages from the dominant Lebanese intellectual discourse about postwar collective memory. The melancholic and suicidal intellectual in Jaber's novel is therefore merely an individual suffering from an acute sense of loss that is not collective but rather personal and intimate. Despite Jaber's disengagement from the prevalent discourse about the role of the public intellectual, he nevertheless presented a new conceptualization of the political. Political commitment in Jaber's narrative discourse emanated not from a commitment to a masternarrative about war and collective memory, but rather from a return to the narrative text as the sole source of meaning.

Seba al-Herz also subverted her precursors' conceptualization of historical generations as well as of the role of the intellectual. For the Saudi writer investigating the traces of past violence on the psyche of the troubled narrator, the concept of generation acquired transhistorical and sectarian dimensions. As the narrator inadvertently revealed, her identity structure did not rely on a generation of male intellectuals shaped by a collective experience of defeat. Instead, the concept of generation, for the narrator, extended over several historical eras beginning with the Battle of Karbala until the recent political turmoil in Qatif. Generational memory, as *The Others* revealed, is constituted by a collective experience of violence that extends over thirteen centuries. The intellectual in al-Herz's novel is therefore no longer a secular Arab writer who taps into a secular and pan-Arab ideological discourse. Instead, this new intellectual, which her brother Hassan embodied, is an avid reader of religious literature and a strict follower of a religious authority that defined his identity within sectarian structures.

Finally, the recent manifestations of the "Arab Spring" since January 2011 have already affected the ways in which young Arabs writers understand both their position in society and the impact of their literary contributions. The scenes of popular protests coming from Egypt and Tunisia, for instance, reveal young journalists, activists, and bloggers who are eschewing the rhetoric of defeat that had characterized the works of their predecessors. Instead, these humorous, confident, and irreverent, writers are celebrating victory in emerging literary language

awaiting further analysis. In the current celebratory atmosphere, it is important that we trace the evolution of the ways in which young writers mourn not only their peers, but also their predecessors.

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